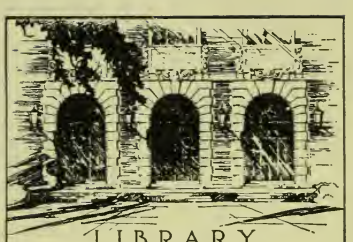

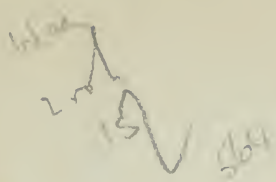

NUTTIE'S FATHER

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BY

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER XVII.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CHAPTER XIX.

CHAPTER XX.

Dorothy Rose

CHAPTER I.

ST. AMBROSE'S CHOIR.

'For be it known
That their saint's honour is their own.'—SCOTT.

THE town of Micklethwayte was rising and thriving. There were salubrious springs which an enterprising doctor had lately brought into notice. The firm of Greenleaf and Dutton manufactured umbrellas in large quantities, from the stout weather-proof family roof down to the daintiest fringed toy of a parasol. There were a Guild Hall and a handsome Corn Market. There was a Modern School for the boys, and a High School for the girls, and a School of Art, and a School of Cookery, and National Schools, and a British School, and a Board School, also churches of every height, chapels of every denomination, and iron mission rooms budding out in hopes to be replaced by churches.

Like one of the animals which zoologists call radiated, the town was constantly stretching out fresh arms along country roads, all living and working, and gradually absorbing the open spaces between. One of

these arms was known as St. Ambrose's Road, in right of the church, an incomplete structure in yellow brick, consisting of a handsome chancel, the stump of a tower, and one aisle just weather-tight and usable, but, by its very aspect, begging for the completion of the beautiful design that was suspended above the alms-box.

It was the evening of a summer day which had been very hot. The choir practice was just over, and the boys came out trooping and chattering; very small ones they were; for as soon as they began to sing tolerably they were sure to try to get into the choir of the old church, which had a foundation that fed, clothed, taught, and finally apprenticed them. So, though the little fellows were clad in surplices and cassocks, and sat in the chancel for correctness sake, there was a space round the harmonium reserved for the more trustworthy band of girls and young women who came forth next, followed by four or five mechanics.

Behind came the nucleus of the choir—a slim, fair-haired youth of twenty; a neat, precise, well-trimmed man, closely shaven, with stooping shoulders, at least fifteen years older, with a black poodle at his heels, as well shorn as his master, newly risen from lying outside the church door; a gentle, somewhat drooping lady in black, not yet middle-aged and very pretty; a small eager, unformed, black-eyed girl, who could hardly keep back her words for the outside of the church door; a tall self-possessed handsome woman, with a fine classical cast of features; and lastly, a brown-faced, wiry,

hardworking clergyman, without an atom of superfluous flesh, but with an air of great energy.

'Oh! vicar, where are we to go?' was the question so eager to break forth.

'Not to the Crystal Palace, Nuttie. The funds won't bear it. Mr. Dutton says we must spend as little as possible on locomotion.'

'I'm sure I don't care for the Crystal Palace. A trumpery tinsel place, all shams.'

'Hush, hush, my dear, not so loud,' said the quiet lady; but Nuttie only wriggled her shoulders, though her voice was a trifle lowered. 'If it were the British Museum now, or Westminster Abbey.'

'Or the Alps,' chimed in a quieter voice, 'or the Uffizi.'

'Now, Mr. Dutton, that's not what I want. Our people aren't ready for that, but what they have let it be real. Miss Mary, don't you see what I mean?'

'Rather better than Miss Egremont herself,' said Mr. Dutton.

'Well,' said the vicar, interposing in the wordy war, 'Mrs. Greenleaf's children have scarletina, so we can't go to Horton Bishop. The choice seems to be between South Beach and Monks Horton.'

'That's no harm,' cried Nuttie; 'Mrs. Greenleaf is so patronising!'

'And both that and South Beach are so stale,' said the youth.

'As if the dear sea could ever be stale,' cried the young girl.

'I thought Monks Horton was forbidden ground,' said Miss Mary.

'So it was with the last *régime*,' said the vicar; 'but now the new people are come I expect great things from them. I hear they are very friendly.'

'I expect nothing from them,' said Nuttie so sententiously that all her hearers laughed and asked 'her exquisite reason,' as Mr. Dutton put it.

'Lady Kirkaldy and a whole lot of them came into the School of Art.'

'And didn't appreciate "Head of Antinous by Miss Ursula Egremont,"' was the cry that interrupted her, but she went on with dignity unruffled—'Anything so foolish and inane as their whole talk and all their observations I never heard. "I don't like this style," one of them said. "Such ugly useless things! I never see anything pretty and neatly finished such as we used to do."' The girl gave it in a tone of mimicry of the nonchalant voice, adding, with fresh imitation, '"And another did not approve of drawing from the life—models might be such strange people."'

'My ears were not equally open to their profanities,' said Miss Mary. 'I confess that I was struck by the good breeding and courtesy of the leader of the party, who, I think, was Lady Kirkaldy herself.'

'I saw! I thought she was patronising you, and my blood boiled!' cried Nuttie.

'Will boiling blood endure a picnic in the park of so much ignorance, folly, and patronage?' asked Mr. Dutton.

'Oh, indeed, Mr. Dutton, Nuttie never said that,' exclaimed gentle Mrs. Egremont.

'Whether it is fully worth the doing is the question,' said the vicar.

'Grass and shade do not despise,' said Miss Mary.

'There surely must be some ecclesiastical remains,' said the young man.

'And there is a river,' added the vicar.

'I shall get a stickleback for my aquarium,' cried Nuttie. 'We shall make some discoveries for the Scientific Society. I shall note down every individual creature I see! I say! you are sure it is not a sham waterfall or Temple of Tivoli!'

'It would please the choir boys and G. F. S. girls quite as much, if not more, in that case,' said Miss Mary; 'but you need not expect that, Nuttie. Landscape-gardening is gone by.'

'Even with the county people?' said Nuttie.

'By at least half a century,' said Mr. Dutton, 'with all deference to this young lady's experience.'

'It was out of their own mouths,' cried the girl defiantly. 'That's all I know about county people, and so I hope it will be.'

'Come in, my dear, you are talking very fast,' interposed Mrs. Egremont, with some pain in the soft sweet voice, which, if it had been a little stronger, would have been the best in the choir.

These houses in St. Ambrose's Road were semi-detached. The pair which the party had reached had their entrances at the angles, with a narrow gravel

path leading by a tiny grass plat to each. One, which was covered with a rich pall of purple clematis, was the home of Mrs. Egremont, her aunt, and Nuttie; the other, adorned with a Gloire de Dijon rose in second bloom, was the abode of Mary Nugent, with her mother, the widow of a naval captain. Farther on, with adjoining gardens, was another couple of houses, in one of which lived Mr. Dutton; in the other lodged the youth, Gerard Godfrey, together with the partner of the principal medical man. The opposite neighbours were a master of the Modern School and a scholar. Indeed, the saying of the vicar, the Rev. Francis Spyers, was, and St. Ambrose's Road was proud of it, that it was a professional place. Every one had something to do either with schools or umbrellas, scarcely excepting the doctor and the solicitor, for the former attended the pupils and the latter supplied them. Mr. Dutton was a partner in the umbrella factory, and lived, as the younger folk said, as the old bachelor of the Road. Had he not a housekeeper, a poodle, and a cat; and was not his house, with lovely sill boxes full of flowers in the windows, the neatest of the neat; and did not the tiny conservatory over his dining-room window always produce the flowers most needed for the altar vases, and likewise bouquets for the tables of favoured ladies. Why, the very daisies never durst lift their heads on his little lawn, which even bore a French looking-glass globe in the centre. Miss Nugent, or Miss Mary as every one still called her, as her elder sister's marriage was recent, was assistant teacher at

the School of Art, and gave private drawing lessons, so as to supplement the pension on which her mother lived. They also received girls as boarders attending the High School.

So did Miss Headworth, who had all her life been one of those people who seem condemned to toil to make up for the errors or disasters of others. First she helped to educate a brother, and soon he had died to leave an orphan daughter to be bred up at her cost. The girl had married from her first situation; but had almost immediately lost her husband at sea, and on this her aunt had settled at Micklethwayte to make a home for her and her child, at first taking pupils, but when the High School was set up, changing these into boarders; while Mrs. Egremont went as daily governess to the children of a family of somewhat higher pretensions. Little Ursula, or Nuttie, as she was called, according to the local contraction, was like the child of all the party, and after climbing up through the High School to the last form, hoped, after passing the Cambridge examination, to become a teacher there in another year.

CHAPTER II.

MONKS HORTON.

'And we will all the pleasures prove,
By shallow rivers, by whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals.'—*Old Ballad.*

It was holiday-time, and liberties were taken such as were not permissible, when they might have afforded a bad precedent to the boarders. Therefore, when two afternoons later Mary Nugent, returning from district visiting, came out into her garden behind the house, she was not scandalised to see a pair of little black feet under a holland skirt resting on a laurel branch, and going a few steps more she beheld a big shady hat, and a pair of little hands busy with a pencil and a blank book; as Ursula sat on the low wall between the gardens, shaded by the laburnum which facilitated the ascent on her own side.

'Oh Miss Mary! Delicious! Come up here! You don't know how charming this is.'

She moved aside so as to leave the ascent—by an inverted flower-pot and a laurel branch—open to her friend, thus knocking down one of the pile of books

which she had taken to the top of the wall. Miss Nugent picked it up, '*Marie Stuart!* Is this your way of studying her?'

'Now, you know 'tis holiday time, and volunteer work; besides, she was waiting for you, and I could not help doing this.' She held out a hand, which was scarcely needed, and Mary sprang lightly to share her perch upon the wall. 'Look here!'

'Am I to guess the subject as in the game of historic outlines,' said Miss Nugent, as the book was laid on her lap. 'It looks like a modern—no, a mediæval—edition of Marcus Curtius about to leap into the capital opening for a young man, only with his dogs instead of his horse. That hound seems very rationally to object.'

'Now don't! Guess in earnest.'

'A compliment to your name. The Boy of Egremont, poor fellow, just about to bound across the strid.'

'Exactly! I always feel sure that my father must have done something like this.'

'Was it so heroic?' said Miss Mary. 'You know it was for the hundredth time, and he had no reason to expect any special danger.'

'Oh but his mother was waiting, and he had to go. Now, I'll tell you how it must have been with my father. You know he sailed away in a yacht before I was born, and poor mother never saw him again; but I know what happened. There was a ship on fire like the *Birkenhead*, and the little yacht went near to

pick up the people, and my father called out, like Sir Humphrey Gilbert—

> "Do not fear, Heaven is as near
> By water as by land."

And the little yacht was so close when the great ship blew up that it got sucked down in the whirlpool, and rescuers and all died a noble death together!'

'Has your mother been telling you?' asked Miss Mary.

'Oh no! she never mentions him. She does not know. No one does; but I am quite sure he died nobly, with no one to tell the tale, only the angels to look on, and that makes it all the finer. Or just suppose he was on a desert island all the time, and came back again to find us! I sometimes think he is.'

'What? When you are *quite sure* of the other theory?'

'I mean I am quite sure while I am thinking about it, or reading *Robinson Crusoe,* or the *Swiss Family.*'

'Oh!'

'Miss Mary, has no one ever told you anything about my father?'

'No one.'

'They never tell me. Mother cries, and aunt Ursula puts on her "there's-an-end-of-it look." Do you think there is anything they are waiting to tell me till I am older?'

'If there were, I am sure you had better not try to find it out beforehand.'

'You don't think I would do anything of *that sort?* But I thought you might know. Do you remember their first settling here?'

'Scarcely. I was a very small child then.'

Miss Nugent had a few vague recollections which she did not think it expedient to mention. A dim remembrance rose before her of mysterious whisperings about that beautiful young widow, and that it had been said that the rector of the Old Church had declared himself to know the ladies well, and had heartily recommended them. She thought it wiser only to speak of having been one of their first scholars, telling of the awe Miss Headworth inspired; but the pleasure it was to bring a lesson to pretty Mrs. Egremont, who always rewarded a good one with a kiss, 'and she was so nice to kiss—yes, and is.'

'Aunt Ursel and mother both were governesses,' continued the girl, 'and yet they don't want me to go out. They had rather I was a teacher at the High School.'

'They don't want to trust their Little Bear out in the world.'

'I think it is more than that,' said the girl. 'I can't help thinking that he—my father—must have been some one rather grand, with such a beautiful name as Alwyn Piercefield Egremont. Yes; I know it was that, for I saw my baptismal certificate when I stood for the scholarship; it was Dieppe,—Ursula Alice, daughter of Alwyn Piercefield and Alice Elizabeth

Egremont, May 15, 1860. James Everett—I think he was the chaplain at Dieppe.'

Mary Nugent thought it the wisest way to laugh and say: 'You, of all people in the world, to want to make out a connection with the aristocracy!'

'True love is different,' said Ursula. 'He must have been cast off by his family for her sake, and have chosen poverty:—

> "To make the croon a pund, my Alwyn gaed to sea,
> And the croon and the pund, they were baith for me."'

Miss Mary did not think a yacht a likely place for the conversion of a croon into a pound, and the utter silence of mother and aunt did not seem to her satisfactory; but she feared either to damp the youthful enthusiasm for the lost father, or to foster curiosity that might lead to some painful discovery, so she took refuge in an inarticulate sound.

'I think Mr. Dutton knows,' proceeded Nuttie.

'You don't mean to ask him?'

'Catch me! I know how he would look at me.'

'Slang! A forfeit!'

'Oh, it's holiday time, and the boarders can't hear. There's Mr. Dutton's door!'

This might in one way be a relief to Miss Nugent, but she did not like being caught upon the wall, and therefore made a rapid descent, though not without a moment's entanglement of skirt, which delayed her long enough to show where she had been, as Mr. Dutton was at the same moment advancing to his own wall

on the opposite side of the Nugent garden. Perhaps he would have pretended to see nothing but for Nuttie's cry of glee.

'You wicked elf,' said Miss Mary, 'to inveigle people into predicaments, and then go shouting ho! ho! ho! like Robin Goodfellow himself.'

'You should have kept your elevation and dignity like me,' retorted Ursula; 'and then you would have had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Dutton climbing his wall and coming to our feet.'

'Mischievous elves deserve no good news,' said Mr. Dutton, who was by no means so venerable that the crossing the wall was any effort or compromise of dignity, and who had by this time joined Mary on her grass plat.

'Oh, what is it! Are we to go to Monks Horton?' cried Nuttie.

'Here is a gracious permission from Lord Kirkaldy, the only stipulations being that no vestiges of the meal, such as sandwich papers or gooseberry skins, be left on the grass; and that nobody does any mischief,' he added in an awful tone of personality. 'So if I see anybody rooting up holly trees I shall be bound to interfere.'

'Now, Mr. Dutton, it was only a baby holly in a chink.'

'Only a holly tree! Just like the giant's daughter when she *only* carried off waggon, peasant, oxen, and all in her pinafore.'

'It is not longer than my finger now!'

'Well, remember, mischief either wanton or scientific is forbidden. You are to set an example to the choir-boys.'

'Scientific mischief is a fatal thing to rare plants,' said Mary.

'If I'm not to touch anything, I may as well stay at home,' pouted Nuttie.

'You may gather as many buttercups and daisies as the sweet child pleases,' said Mr. Dutton; whereupon she threatened to throw her books at his head.

Miss Nugent asked how they were to go, and Mr. Dutton explained that there was only a quarter of a mile's walk from the station; that return tickets would be furnished at a tariff of fourpence a head; and that there would be trains at 1.15 and 7.30.

'How hungry the children will be.'

'They will eat all the way. That's the worst of this sort of outing. They eat to live and live to eat.'

'At least they don't eat at church,' said Nuttie.

'Not since the peppermint day, when Mr. Spyers suspended Dickie Drake,' put in Mary.

'And the Spa Terrace Church people said it was incense.'

'No, Nuttie!'

'Indeed they did. Louisa Barnet attacked us about it at school, and I said I wished it had been. Only they mustn't eat peppermint in the train, for it makes mother quite ill.'

'Do you mean that Mrs. Egremont will come?' exclaimed Mr. Dutton.

'Oh yes, she shall. It is not too far, and it will be very good for her. I shall make her.'

'There's young England's filial duty!' said Mary.

'Why, I know what is good for her, and she always does as "I wish."'

'Beneficent despotism!' said Mr. Dutton. 'May I ask if Miss Headworth is an equally obedient subject.'

'Oh! Aunt Ursel is very seldom tiresome.'

'Nuttie! Nuttie! my dear,' and a head with the snows of more than half a century appeared on the other side of the wall, under a cap and parasol. 'I am sorry to interrupt you, but it is cool enough for your mother to go into the town, and I wish you to go with her.'

CHAPTER III.

HEIR HUNTING.

'And she put on her gown of green,
And left her mother at sixteen,
To marry Peter Bell!'—WORDSWORTH.

IN the shrubberies of Monks Horton were walking a lady somewhat past middle age, but full of activity and vigour, with one of those bright faces that never grow old, and with her a young man, a few years over twenty, with a grave and almost careworn countenance.

More and more confidential waxed the conversation, for the lady was making fresh acquaintance with a nephew seldom seen since he had been her pet and darling as almost a baby, and he was experiencing the inexpressible charm of tone and manner that recalled the young mother he had lost in early boyhood.

'Then your mind is made up,' she said; 'you are quite right to decide on having a profession; but how does your father take it?'

'He is quite convinced that to repeat my uncle's life, dangling on as heir, would be the most fatal mistake.'

'Assuredly, and all the legal knowledge you acquire is so much in favour of your usefulness as the squire.'

'If I ever am the squire, of which I have my doubts.'

'You expect Mr. Egremont to marry?'

'Not a future marriage? but one in the past.'

'A private marriage! Do you suspect it?'

'I don't suspect it—I know it. I have been hoping to talk the matter over with you. Do you remember our first governess, Miss Headworth?'

'My dear Mark, did I not lose at Pera the charms of your infancy?'

'Then neither my mother nor my grandmother ever wrote to you about her?'

'I do remember that it struck me that immunity from governesses was a compensation for the lack of daughters.'

'Can you tell me no details,' said Mark anxiously. 'Have you no letters? It was about the time when Blanche was born, when we were living at Raxley.'

'I am sorry to say that our roving life prevented my keeping old letters. I have often regretted it. Let me see, there was one who boxed May's ears.'

'That was long after. I think it was that woman's barbarity that made my father marry again, and a very good thing that was. It was wretched before. Miss Headworth was in my own mother's time.'

'I begin to remember something happening that your mother seemed unable to write about, and your grandmother said that she had been greatly upset by

"that miserable affair," but I was never exactly told what it had been.'

'Miss Headworth came when I was four or five years old. Edda, as we used to call her in May's language, was the first person who gave me a sense of beauty. She had dark eyes and a lovely complexion. I remember in after times being silenced for saying, "not so pretty as my Edda." I was extremely fond of her, enough to have my small jealousy excited when my uncle joined us in our walks, and monopolised her, turning May and me over to play with his dog!'

'But, Mark, Mr. Egremont is some years older than your father. He could not have been a young man at that time.'

'So much the worse. Most likely he seemed to her quite paternal. The next thing I recollect was our being in the Isle of Wight, we two children, with Miss Headworth and the German nurse, and our being told of our new sister. Uncle Alwyn and his yacht were there, and we went on board once or twice. Then matters became confused with me, I recollect a confusion, papa and grandmamma suddenly arriving, everybody seeming to us to have become very cross, our dear Miss Headworth no where to be found, our attendants being changed, and our being forbidden to speak of her again. I certainly never thought of the matter till a month ago. You know my uncle's eyes have been much affected by his illness, and he has made a good deal of use of me. He has got a valet, a fellow of no particular country, more Savoyard than

anything else, I fancy. He is a legacy, like other evils, from the old General, and seems a sort of necessity to my uncle's existence. Gregorio they call him. He was plainly used to absolute government, and viewed the coming down amongst us as an assertion of liberty much against his will. We could see that he was awfully jealous of my father and me, and would do anything to keep us out; but providentially he can't write English decently, though he can speak any language you please. Well, the man and I came into collision about a scamp of a groom who was doing intolerable mischief in the village, and whom they put it on me to get discharged. On that occasion Mr. Gregorio grew insolent, and intimated to me that I need not make so sure of the succession. He knew that which might make the Chanoine and me change our note. Well, my father is always for avoiding rows; he said it was an unmeaning threat, it was of no use to complain of Gregorio, and we must digest his insolence. But just after, Uncle Alwyn sent me to hunt up a paper that was missing, and in searching a writing-case I came upon an unmistakable marriage certificate between Alwyn Piercefield Egremont and Alice Headworth, and then the dim recollections I told you of began to return.'

'What did you do?'

'I thought I had better consult my father, expecting to hear that she was dead, and that no further notice need be taken of the matter. But he was greatly disturbed to hear of the certificate, and would

hardly believe me. He said that some friend of my grandmother had written her word of goings on at Freshwater between his brother and the young governess, and that they went off at once to put a stop to it, but found us left with the German maid, who declared that Miss Headworth had gone off with Mr. Egremont in the yacht. No more was heard of my uncle for six weeks, and when he came back there was a great row with the old General, but he absolutely denied being married. I am afraid that was all the old sinner wished, and they went off together in the yacht to the West Indies, where it was burnt; but they, as you know, never came to England again, going straight off to the Mediterranean, having their head-quarters at Sorrento, and cruising about till the General's death ten years ago.'

'Yes, I once met them at Florence, and thought them two weary pitiable men. One looked at the General as a curious relic of the old buck of the Regency days, and compassionated his nephew for having had his life spoilt by dangling after the old man. It was a warning indeed, and I am glad you have profited by it, Mark.'

'He came back, after the old man died, to club life in London, and seldom has been near the old place; indeed, it has been let till recently, and he wants to let it again, but it is altogether too dilapidated for that without repairs. So he came down to see about it, and was taken ill there. But to return to what my father told me. He was shocked to hear of the certifi-

cate, for he had implicitly believed his brother's denial of the marriage, and he said Miss Headworth was so childish and simple that she might easily have been taken in by a sham ceremony. He said that he now saw he had done very wrong in letting his mother-in-law take all the letters about "that unhappy business" off his hands without looking at them, but he was much engrossed by my mother's illness, and, as he said, it never occurred to him as a duty to trace out what became of the poor thing, and see that she was provided for safely. You know Mrs. Egremont says *laissez faire* is our family failing, and that our first thought is how *not* to do it.'

'Yes, utter repudiation of such cases was the line taken by the last generation; and I am afraid my mother would be very severe.'

'Another thing that actuated my father was the fear of getting his brother into trouble with General Egremont, as he himself would have been the one to profit by it. So I do not wonder so much at his letting the whole drop without inquiry, and never even looking at the letters, which there certainly were. I could not get him to begin upon it with my uncle, but Mrs. Egremont was strongly on my side in thinking that such a thing ought to be looked into, and as I had found the paper it would be best that I should speak. Besides that there was no enduring that Gregorio should be pretending to hold us in terror by such hints.'

'Well, and has there been a wife and family in a cottage all this time?'

'Aunt Margaret, he has never seen or heard of her since he left her at Dieppe! Would you believe it, he thinks himself a victim? He never meant more than to amuse himself with the pretty little governess, and he took on board a Mr. and Mrs. Houghton to do propriety, shady sort of people I imagine, but that she did not know.'

'I have heard of them,' said Lady Kirkaldy, significantly.

'She must have been a kind friend to the poor girl,' said Mark. 'On some report that Lady de Lyonnais was coming down on her, wrathful and terrible, the poor foolish girl let herself be persuaded to be carried off in the yacht, but there Mrs. Houghton watched over her like a dragon. She made them put in at some little place in Jersey, put in the banns, all unknown to my uncle, and got them married. Each was trying to outwit the other, while Miss Headworth herself was quite innocent and unconscious, and, I don't know whether to call it an excuse for Uncle Alwyn or not, but to this hour he is not sure whether it was a legal marriage, and my father believes it was not, looking on it as a youthful indiscretion. He put her in lodgings at Dieppe, under Mrs. Houghton's protection, while he returned home on a peremptory summons from the General. He found the old man in such a state of body and mind as he tries to persuade me was an excuse for denying the whole thing, and from that time he represents himself as bound hand and foot by the General's tyranny. He meant to have kept the secret,

given her an allowance, and run over from time to time to see her, but he only could get there once before the voyage to the West Indies. The whole affair was, as he said, complicated by his debts, those debts that the estate has never paid off. The General probably distrusted him, for he curtailed his allowance, and scarcely let him out of sight; and he—he submitted for the sake of his prospects, and thinking the old man much nearer his end than he proved to be. I declare as I listened, it came near to hearing him say he had sold his soul to Satan! From the day he sailed in the *Ninon* he has never written, never attempted any communication with the woman whose life he had wrecked, except one inquiry at Dieppe, and that was through Gregorio.'

'What! the valet?'

'Yes. I believe I seemed surprised at such a medium being employed, for Uncle Alwyn explained that the man had got hold of the secret somehow—servants always know everything—and being a foreigner he was likely to be able to trace her out.

'I daresay he profited by the knowledge to keep Alwyn in bondage during the old man's lifetime.'

'I have no doubt of it, and he expected to play the same game with me. The fellow reminds me, whenever I look at him, of a sort of incarnate familiar demon. When I asked my uncle whether he could guess what had become of her, he held up his hands with a hideous French grimace. I could have taken him by the throat.'

'Nay, one must pity him. The morals of George IV.'s set had been handed on to him by the General,' said Lady Kirkaldy, rejoicing in the genuine indignation of the young face, free from all taint of vice, if somewhat rigid. 'And what now?'

'He assured me that he could make all secure to my father and me, as if that were the important point; but finally he perceived that we had no right to stand still without endeavouring to discover whether there be a nearer heir, and my father made him consent to my making the search, grinning at its Quixotism all the time.'

'Have you done anything?'

'Yes. I have been to Jersey, seen the register—July 20, 1859—and an old French-speaking clerk, who perfectly recollected the party coming from the yacht, and spoke of her as *très belle*. I have also ascertained that there is no doubt of the validity of the marriage. Then, deeply mistrusting Master Gregorio, I went on to Dieppe, where I entirely failed to find any one who knew or remembered anything about them—there is such a shifting population of English visitors and residents, and it was so long ago. I elicited from my uncle that she had an aunt, he thought, of the same name as herself; but my father cannot remember who recommended her, or anything that can be a clue. Has any one looked over my grandmother's letters?'

'I think not. My brother spoke of keeping them till I came to London. That might give a chance, or

the Houghtons might know about her. I think my husband could get them hunted up. They are sure to be at some continental resort.'

'What's that?' as a sound of singing was heard.

'"Auld Langsyne." The natives are picnicking in the ravine below there. They used to be rigidly excluded, but we can't stand that; and this is the first experiment of admitting them on condition that they don't make themselves obnoxious.'

'Which they can't help.'

'We have yet to see if this is worse than an Austrian or Italian festival. See, we can look down from behind this yew tree. It really is a pretty sight from this distance.'

'There's the cleric heading his little boys and their cricket, and there are the tuneful party in the fern on the opposite side. They have rather good voices, unless they gain by distance.'

'And there's a girl botanising by the river.'

'Sentimentalising over forget-me-nots, more likely.'

'My dear Mark, for a specimen of young England, you are greatly behindhand in perception of progress!'

'Ah! you are used to foreigners, Aunt Margaret. You have never fathomed English vulgarity.'

'It would serve you right to send you to carry the invitation to go round the gardens and houses.'

'Do you mean it, aunt?'

'Mean it? Don't you see your uncle advancing down the road—there—accosting the clergyman—what's his name—either Towers or Spires—something

ecclesiastical I know. We only waited to reconnoitre and see whether the numbers were unmanageable.'

'And yet he does not want to sit for Micklethwayte?'

'So you think no one can be neighbourly except for electioneering! O Mark, I must take you in hand.'

'Meantime the host is collecting. I abscond. Which is the least show part of the establishment?'

'I recommend the coal cellar——' and, as he went off—'Poor boy, he is a dear good fellow, but how little he knows how to be laughed at!'

CHAPTER IV.

A NAME.

'Sigh no more lady, lady sigh no more,
Men were deceivers ever,
One foot on sea and one on land—
To one thing constant never.'—*Old Ballad.*

'So you have ventured out again,' said Lady Kirkaldy, as her nephew strolled up to her afternoon tea-table under a great cedar tree:

'The coast being clear, and only distant shouts being heard in the ravine——

'"Like an army defeated
The choir retreated;
And now doth fare well
In the valley's soft swell,"'

said the aunt.

'At least you have survived; or is this the reaction,' said the nephew, putting on a languid air.

'There were some very nice people among them, on whom the pictures were by no means thrown away. What would you say, Mark, if I told you that I strongly suspect that I have seen your lost aunt?'

'Nonsense!' cried Mark, as emphatically as disrespectfully.

'I am not joking in the least,' said Lady Kirkaldy, looking up at him. 'I heard the name of Egremont, and made out that it belonged to a very lady-like pretty-looking woman in gray and white; she seemed to be trying to check and tame a bright girl of eighteen or so, who was in a perfect state of rapture over the Vandykes. I managed to ask the clergyman who the lady was, and he told me she was a Mrs. Egremont, who lives with her aunt, a Miss Headworth, who boards girls for the High School; very worthy people, he added.'

'Headworth?'

'Yes.'

'But if it were, she would have known your name.'

'Hardly. The title had not come in those days; and if she heard of us at all it would be as Kerrs. I ventured further to put out a feeler by asking whether he knew what her husband had been, and he said he believed he had been lost at sea, but he, Mr. Spyers I mean, had only been at Micklethwayte three or four years, and had merely known her as a widow.'

'I suppose it is worth following up,' said Mark, rather reluctantly. 'I wish I had seen her. I think I should know Miss Headworth again, and she would hardly know me.'

'You see what comes of absconding.'

'After all, it was best,' said Mark. 'Supposing her to be the real woman, which I don't expect, it might

have been awkward if she had heard my name! How can we ascertain the history of this person without committing ourselves?'

Lord Kirkaldy, an able man, who had been for many years a diplomatist, here joined the party, and the whole story was laid before him. He was new to Micklethwayte, having succeeded a somewhat distant kinsman, and did not know enough of the place to be able to fix on any one to whom to apply for information; but the result of the consultation was that Lady Kirkaldy should go alone to call on Miss Headworth, and explain that she was come to inquire about a young lady of the same name, who had once been governess to the children of her sister, Lady Adelaide Egremont. Mark was rather a study to his uncle and aunt all the evening. He was as upright and honourable as the day, and not only acted on high principle, but had a tender feeling to the beautiful playfellow governess, no doubt enhanced by painful experiences of successors chosen for their utter dissimilarity to her. Still it was evidently rather flat to find himself probably so near the tangible goal of his romantic search; and the existence of a first cousin had been startling to him, though his distaste was more to the taking her from second-rate folk in a country town than to the overthrow of his own heirship. At least so he manifestly and honestly believed, and knowing it to be one of those faiths that make themselves facts, the Kirkaldys did not disturb him in it, nor commiserate him for a loss which they thought the best thing possible for him.

Miss Headworth was accustomed to receive visitors anent boarders, so when Lady Kirkaldy's card was brought to her, the first impression was that some such arrangement was to be made. She was sitting in her pretty little drawing-room alone, for Nuttie and her mother had gone out for a walk with Miss Nugent.

The room, opening on the garden, and cool with blinds, had a certain homely grace about the faded furniture. The drawings on the walls were good, the work quaint and tasteful. There was a grand vase of foxgloves before the empty grate, and some Marshal Nial roses in a glass on the table. The old lady herself—with alert black eyes and a sweet expression—rose from her chair in the window to receive her guest.

Lady Kirkaldy felt reassured as to the refinement of the surroundings, and liked the gentle but self-possessed tones of the old lady. She noticed the foxgloves.

'Yes,' said Miss Headworth, 'they are the fruits of yesterday's expedition. My two children, as I call them, brought them home in triumph. I cannot tell you what pleasure Lord Kirkaldy's kindness gave them —and many more.'

'I am glad,' said the lady, while she said to herself, 'now for it,' and sat forward. 'It struck me,' she said, 'on hearing your name that you might be related to—to a young lady who lived a good while ago in the family of my sister, Lady Adelaide Egremont.'

A strange look came into Miss Headworth's eyes,

her lips trembled, she clutched tightly the arm of her chair, but then cast a puzzled glance at her visitor.

'Perhaps if you heard of me then,' said the latter, 'it was as Lady Margaret Kerr.'

'Yes,' said Miss Headworth, then pausing, she collected herself and said in an anxious voice, 'Do I understand that your ladyship is come to inquire for my niece, being aware of the circumstances.'

'I only became aware of them yesterday,' said Lady Kirkaldy. 'I was in Turkey at the time, and no particulars were given to me; but my nephew, Mark Egremont, your niece's old pupil, came to consult us, having just discovered among his uncle's papers evidence of the marriage, of which of course he had been ignorant.'

'Then,' exclaimed Miss Headworth, holding her hands tightly clasped, 'Shall I really see justice done at last to my poor child?'

'It is young Mark's most earnest wish and his father——' Lady Kirkaldy hesitated for a word, and Miss Headworth put in:

'His father! Why would he never even acknowledge either Alice's letters or mine? We wrote several times both to him and Lady Adelaide, and never received any reply, except one short one, desiring he might not be troubled on such a subject. It was cruel! Alice said it was not in his writing. She had done very wrong, and the family might well be offended, but a poor child like her, just eighteen, might have been treated with some pity.'

'My sister was in declining health. He was very

much engrossed. He left the matter to—to others,' said Lady Kirkaldy. 'He is very sorry now that he acquiesced in what was then thought right. He did not then know that there had been a marriage.'

'I should have thought in that case a clergyman would have been bound to show the more compassion.'

Lady Kirkaldy knew that the cruel silence had been chiefly the work of the stern Puritan pitilessness of her mother, so she passed this over, saying, 'We are all very anxious to atone, as far as possible, for what is past, but we know little or nothing, only what my nephew Mark has been able to gather.'

'Little Mark! Alice always talked of him with great affection. How pleased she will be to hear of his remembering her.'

'Would you object to telling me what you know of this history?' said Lady Kirkaldy. 'I am afraid it is very painful to you, but I think we should understand it clearly. Please speak to me as a friend, as woman to woman.'

'Your ladyship is very kind,' said the poor old lady. 'I have only mentioned the subject once since we came to settle here, seventeen years ago, but such things one cannot forget. If you will excuse me, I have some dates that will assist my accuracy.'

She hurried away, and came back in a few moments, having evidently dried some tears, perhaps of thankfulness, but she paused as if reluctant to begin.

'I think your niece had no nearer relation than

yourself,' said Lady Kirkaldy, anxious to set her off and at ease.

'Oh no, or she never would have been so treated. She was an orphan. My poor brother was a curate. He married—as young men will—on insufficient means, his strength gave way, and he died of diphtheria when this poor child was only two years old. Indeed, two little ones died at the same time, and the mother married again and went to Shanghai. She did not long live there, poor thing, and little Alice was sent home to me. I thought I did my best for her by keeping her at a good school. I have often wished that I had given up my situation, and become an assistant there, so as to have her more under my own eyes; but I fancied it important to receive a salary out of which I could save. I am wearying your ladyship, but I can't but dwell on the excuses for my poor child.'

'Indeed I wish to hear all the details,' was the sincere and gentle answer.

'I had her with me generally in the holidays, and I confess I was absolutely alarmed to see how pretty the child was growing, knowing how great a disadvantage it often is. She was always a good girl, not naturally so studious as could be wished, but docile, merry, gentle, a favourite with every one, and peculiarly innocent and childish. I wished her to remain a few years longer as teacher, but it so happened that Lady Adelaide Egremont, coming to consult the head of the establishment about a nursery-

governess, saw Alice, and was so much struck with her sweet face, which was all sunshine then, as to insist on engaging her.'

'Ah! my dear sister, I remember her enthusiastic letter about her pretty governess, and her boy's affection for her, an affection that has lasted——'

'It seemed so safe. A clergyman's family in the country, and so kind a lady at the head, that, though Alice had been educated for a superior governess, it appeared the best beginning she could have. And she was very happy, and met with great kindness. Only, unfortunately, Lady Adelaide was delicate, and for many weeks entirely confined to the sofa. Mr. Egremont's elder brother was much there. He seemed to my poor inexperienced child quite elderly, and his attentions like those of—of an old uncle—she told me afterwards——'

'He must really have been over forty——'

'No doubt my poor Alice was unguarded. We know what a merry, happy, childish girl may be, but I never heard that her conduct was even censured while she remained at Raxley, though I find that Captain Egremont used to join them in their walks, under pretext of playing with the children. Then she was sent to Freshwater with the two eldest children during Lady Adelaide's confinement, and there, most unjustifiably, Captain Egremont continually visited them from his yacht, and offered to take them out in it. Alice knew she ought not to go without a married lady on board, and he brought a Mr.

and Mrs. Houghton to call, who were very kind and caressing to her and the children, so that she thought all was right. Oh! Lady Kirkaldy, I don't mean to defend her, I daresay she was very giddy and silly, she reproaches herself, poor dear, but I do say that a wicked advantage was taken of her innocence and ignorance. She says that she had begun to grow a little uneasy at the way people looked when Captain Egremont joined them on the beach; and the nurse, a German, said something that she could not understand. On the 1st of July—yes—but I have the date here—came a telegram to the hotel to have rooms for Lady de Lyonnais and Mr. Egremont ready by the evening. The whole place knew it, and some meddling person burst on Alice with the news, roughly and coarsely given, that they were coming to call her to account for her goings on. Captain Egremont found her crying in the utmost terror, and—she really hardly knew what he said to her—she thinks he offered to shelter her on board the *Ninon* from Lady de Lyonnais' first wrath while he and Mrs. Houghton explained matters; but she cannot tell, for she lost her senses with fright, only knew that he was kind and sweet to her in her distress, and thought only of escaping. Well, I don't excuse her. Of course it was the most terrible and fatal thing she could have done, and——' The good old lady was quite overcome, and Lady Kirkaldy had tears in her eyes as she said,

'It was frightful folly—but she was guarded.'

'Yes, her innocence was guarded, thank God,' said

Miss Headworth fervently. 'You see she did know that Mr. and Mrs. Houghton were on board, and Mrs. Houghton was a truly kind protector who deserved her confidence, though, poor lady, she admitted to me that her own conduct had not been—strictly correct.'

'How long was it before you heard of her?'

'There was a dreadful letter from Mr. Egremont enclosing what was due of her salary, and then I heard no more for seven months. I went to the Isle of Wight and made all inquiries, but the nurse and children had gone away immediately, and I could obtain no trace of them.'

'Then she—your niece, never wrote.'

'She was afraid, poor dear. She had never been at her ease with me. Her mother had taught her to think me strict and harsh, and she had never opened to me in those days. Besides, he had forbidden her. At last, however, in January, came a letter from this Mrs. Houghton, telling me that my Alice was very unwell at Dieppe, that nothing had been heard of her husband, Captain Egremont, to whom she had been married on the 20th of July at St. Philippe, in Jersey, and that she herself was obliged to leave the place almost immediately; but she would, if possible, wait till my arrival, as Mrs. Egremont was not in a condition to be left alone. My dear friends, with whom I was then living, were as kind as possible, and set me free to go. I was there in three days, and truly the dear, beautiful, merry girl I had parted with only a year before was a sad piteous sight. Mrs.

Houghton seemed broken-hearted at leaving her, thinking there was little chance of her living; but Mr. Houghton, who, I am afraid, was a professed gambler, had got into some scrape, and was gone to Paris, where she had to follow him. She told me all about it, and how, when Captain Egremont fancied that a marriage in the Channel Islands was one he could play fast and loose with, she had taken care that the formalities should be such as to make all secure. Foolish and wrong as poor Alice had been, she had awakened all the best side of that poor woman's nature, and no mother could have been more careful and tender. She gave me the certificate—here it is—and assured me that it would hold good. I have shown it to a lawyer, and he said the same; but when I sent a copy to Mr. Egremont, my letter was returned unopened.'

'Captain Egremont had denied the marriage, and they believed him,' said Lady Kirkaldy. 'It is hard to believe that he could be so heartless, but he was in bondage to the old General Egremont, and dreaded losing his inheritance.'

'So he told them in his one visit to Dieppe. He said he must keep his marriage secret, but promised an allowance, on condition that Alice would live quietly at Dieppe, and not communicate with any one of her own family or his. He had left £100 with her, but that was nearly gone, and she had never heard from him. It had preyed on her, and she was so ill that I never expected, any more than Mrs. Houghton, to see

her recover. I stayed there with her; she could not be moved, even if she would have consented, when she was continually expecting him; but at last—four days after her little girl was born—came the news of the *Ninon* having been burnt, with all on board, three months before. Do you know, strange to say, though I had feared so much to tell her, she began to revive from that time. The suspense and watching were over. She saw that he had not deserted her, and believed that he had loved her to the last. She cried a great deal, but it was in a peaceful, natural way. I wrote then, as I had already written, to Lady Adelaide and to Mr. Egremont, but was not answered.'

'I can account for that,' said Lady Kirkaldy. 'My sister had been ordered to Madeira in the autumn, and there they remained till her death in May. All the letters were sent to my mother, and she did not think fit to forward, or open, any bearing on the subject. In the meantime Mr. Egremont was presented to the family living, and on his return moved to Bridgefield Egremont. And you came here?'

'Of course I could not part with my poor Alice again. Mr. and Mrs. Fordyce, whose daughter I had long ago educated, had always kept up a correspondence with me, and, knowing all the story, proposed to me to come here. He was then rector of the old church, and by their help and recommendation, with such capital as I had, we were able to begin a little school; and though that has had to give way to the High School, what with boarders, and with Alice's employment as

daily governess, we have, I am thankful to say, gone on very well and comfortably, and my dear child has recovered her cheerfulness, though she can never be quite what—I think she was meant to be,' said the old lady, with a sad smile, 'though perhaps she is something better.'

'Do you think she was absolutely convinced of his death?'

'Do you mean that he is alive?' exclaimed Miss Headworth in dismay. 'Oh! he is a wickeder man than even I supposed, to have forsaken her all these years. Is my poor child in his power? Must her peace, now she has attained it, be disturbed?'

'There is a great deal to take into consideration,' said Lady Kirkaldy. 'I had better tell you how this visit of mine came about, and explain some matters about the Egremont family.'

She then told how Captain Egremont, after a brief service in the Life Guards, had been made to retire, that the old General, whose heir he was, might keep him in attendance on him. Already self-indulgent and extravagant, the idleness of the life he led with the worn-out old *roué* had deadened his better feelings, and habituated him to dissipation, while his debts, his expensive habits, and his dread of losing the inheritance, had bound him over to the General. Both had been saved from the fire in the *Ninon*, whence they were picked up by a Chilian vessel, and they had been long in communicating with home. The General hated England, and was in broken health. He had

spent the remaining years of his life at various continental resorts, where he could enjoy a warm climate, combined with facilities for high play.

When at length he died, Captain Egremont had continued the life to which he had become accustomed, and had of late manifested an expectation that his nephew Mark should play the same part by him as he had done by the General, but the youth, bred in a very different tone, would on no account thus surrender himself to an evil bondage. Indeed he felt all the severity of youthful virtue, and had little toleration for his uncle's ways of thinking; though, when the old man had come home ill, dejected, and half blind, he had allowed himself to be made useful on business matters. And thus he had discovered the marriage, and had taken up the cause with the ardour stimulated by a chivalrous feeling for the beautiful vision of his childhood, whose sudden disappearance had ended his brightest days.

'I suppose it is right and generous of the young man,' said Miss Headworth. 'But since the—the man is alive, I wish my poor Alice could have been left at peace!'

'You forget that her daughter has rights which must be taken into consideration.'

'Little Nuttie! Dear child! I should so far like her to be provided for, so far as that she need not go out in the world to earn her own livelihood. But no! better be as we are than accept anything from that man!'

'I quite understand and respect your feeling, Miss Headworth,' returned the lady; 'but may I return to my question whether you think your niece has any doubt of her husband being dead.'

Miss Headworth considered. 'Since you ask me, I think she has kept the possibility of the life before her. We have never mentioned the subject, and, as I said, the belief in his death ended a great suspense and sense of wounded affection. She began soon and vigorously to turn her attention to the support of her child, and has found a fair measure of happiness; but at the same time she has shrunk from all notice and society, more than would be natural in so very young a widow and so attractive, more than I should have expected from her original character. And once, when she did apprehend symptoms of admiration, she insisted that I should tell the history, enough, as she said, to make it plain that it was impossible. There was one night too, when she had scarletina, and was a little light-headed, only four years ago, when she talked a good deal about his coming back; but that might have been only the old impression on her brain, of that long watching at Dieppe. He—Captain Egremont, does not yet know where she is?'

'No, certainly not. But I fear he must.'

'I suppose he ought,' sighed Miss Headworth; 'but in the meantime, till we know what line he takes, surely she need not be unsettled by the knowledge of his existence.'

'By no means. You had better act as you think

best about that. But you will not object to my nephew, her old pupil, Mark, coming to see her? I will make him promise not to enter upon the subject.'

Miss Headworth had only time to make a sign of reluctant acquiescence when the door opened and mother and daughter came in. Nuttie first, eager as usual and open-mouthed, unaware that any one was there, for Lady Kirkaldy, wishing to avoid talk and observation, had left her carriage at the livery stables, and walked to St. Ambrose Road. The girl, whom in a moment she classed as small, dark, and oddly like May Egremont, stopped short at sight of a stranger; the mother would have retreated but for Miss Headworth's nervous call 'Alice, my dear, here is Lady Kirkaldy.'

Very lovely was Lady Kirkaldy's impression as she saw a slender figure in a dark gray linen dress, and a face of refined, though not intellectual, beauty and sweetness, under a large straw hat with a good deal of white gauziness about it, and the curtsey was full of natural grace.

'You do not know me,' said Lady Kirkaldy, taking her hand, 'but I am aunt to some former pupils of yours, one of whom, Mark Egremont, is very anxious to come and see you.'

'Mark! My dear little Mark,' and her face lighted up. 'How very kind of him. But he is not little Mark now.'

'He is not a very big Mark either. Most of the Egremonts are small. I see your daughter takes after

them,' said Lady Kirkaldy, shaking hands with Ursula, who looked at her in unmitigated amazement.

Alice faltered something about Lady Adelaide.

'My dear sister fell into a decline, and died while the three children were still babies. Poor things, I believe they had a sad time till their father married a Miss Condamine, who has been an excellent step-mother to them. I have been to see them, but Mark was not then at home, so he has come to me at Monks Horton. When will he find you at home? Or may I bring him in at once. He was to meet me at Micklethwayte.'

'I should like very much to see him,' was the answer. And Miss Headworth was obliged to say something about her ladyship taking a cup of tea. Lady Kirkaldy, knowing that Mark was on the watch, set off in search of him, and found him, as she expected, pacing the pavement in front of the church. There was no great distance in which to utter her explanations and cautions, warning him of her promise that the intelligence of the husband's being alive was to be withheld for a fitter time, but he promised dutifully, and his aunt then took him in with her.

The recognition of her claims was a less stunning shock to Alice Egremont than to her aunt. Shielded by her illness, as well as by her simplicity and ignorance, she had never been aware of her aunt's attempted correspondence with the Egremonts, nor of their deafness to appeals made on her behalf. Far less had it ever occurred to her that the validity of her marriage

could be denied, and the heinous error of her elopement seemed to her quite sufficient to account for her having been so entirely cast off by the family. The idea that as wife or widow she had any claims on them, or that Ursula might have rights above those of Mark, had not come into her mind, which, indeed, at the moment was chiefly occupied by the doubt whether the milk was come in, and by ordering in the best teacups, presented by the boarders.

Thus she was in the passage when Mark entered, and his exclamation instantly was 'Oh, Edda, dear old Edda! You aren't a bit altered!' and he put his head under her hat and kissed her, adding, as she seemed rather startled, 'You are my aunt, you know; and where's my cousin? You are Ursula?'

He advanced upon Nuttie, took her by the hand and kissed her forehead before she was aware, but she flashed at him with her black eyes, and looked stiff and defiant. She had no notion of kisses to herself, still less to her pretty mother whom she protected with a half proud, half jealous fondness. How could the man presume to call her by that foolish name? However, that single effusion had exhausted Mark's powers of cordiality, or else Nuttie's stiffness froze him. They were all embarrassed, and had reason to be grateful to Lady Kirkaldy's practised powers as a diplomate's wife. She made the most of Mrs. Egremont's shy spasmodic inquiries, and Mark's jerks of information, such as that they were all living at Bridgefield Egremont, now, that his sister May was very

like his new cousin, that Blanche was come out and was very like his mother, etc. etc. Every one was more at ease when Lady Kirkaldy carried the conversation off to yesterday's entertainment, hoping no one had been overtired, and the like. Mrs. Egremont lighted up a little and began telling some of the expressions of delight she had heard, and in the midst, Nuttie, waking from her trance of stiff displeasure, came plump in with 'Oh! and there's a water-soldier, a real *Stratiotes aculeatus* in your lake. May we get it? Mr. Dutton didn't think we ought, but it would be *such* a prize!'

'Ursula means a rare water-plant,' said Mrs. Egremont gently, seeing that Lady Kirkaldy had no notion of the treasure she possessed. 'She and some of her friends are very eager botanists.'

'I am sure you may,' said the lady, amused.

'Thank you! Then, O mother! Miss Mary and I will go. And we'll wait till after office hours, and then Gerard Godfrey can come and fish it out for us! Oh, thank you. He wants the pattern of the Abbot's cross for an illumination, and he can get some ferns for the church.'

Soon after this ebullition, Lady Kirkaldy carried off her nephew, and his first utterance outside the door was 'A woman like that will be the salvation of my uncle.'

'Firstly, if you can bring them together,' said his aunt; 'and secondly, if there is stuff enough in that pretty creature.'

CHAPTER V.

SUSPENSE.

'Where shall the traitor rest
He, the deceiver?'—Scott.

Poor Miss Headworth's peace of mind was utterly destroyed. That the niece whom she had nursed back to life and happiness, and brought to love her as a mother, should be at the mercy of a man whom she looked on as a heartless profligate, was dreadful to her beyond measure. And it involved Ursula's young life likewise? Could it be a duty, after these eighteen years, to return to him? What legal rights had he to enforce the resumption of the wife he had deserted. 'I will consult Mr. Dutton,' said the old lady to herself; 'Mr. Dutton is the only person who knows the particulars. He will give me the best advice.'

And while Miss Headworth, over her evening toilette, was coming to this resolution in one bedroom, Nuttie, in another, was standing aghast at her mother's agitation, and receiving a confession which filled her with astonishment.

'I can't think why that gentleman should go and be so affectionate all on a sudden,' quoth Nuttie; 'if he is my cousin, and so fond of you, why couldn't he have come to see us before?'

'Oh, Nuttie, dear, you don't understand why it is so good of him! My dear, now this has come, I must tell you—you must hear—the sad thing your mother did. Yes, my dear, I was their governess—and—and I did not——In short, my dear, I eloped.'

'You, mother! Oh what fun!' cried the girl in the utter extremity of wonder.

'Nuttie!' exclaimed Mrs. Egremont, in a tone of horror and indignation—nay, of apprehension.

'O mother—I didn't mean *that!* But I can't get to believe it. You, little mother mine, you that are so timid and bashful and quiet. That you—you should have done such a thing.

'Nuttie, my dear, can't you understand that such a thing would make me quiet? I am always feeling when I see people, or they bring their daughters here, "If they only knew——"'

'No, no, no! They would still see you were the sweetest dear. But tell me all about it. How very much in love you must have been!' said Nuttie, a magnificent vision of a young sailor with curly hair and open throat rising before her.

'I think I was more frightened than in love,' faintly said Mrs. Egremont. 'At least I didn't know it was love, I thought he was only kind to me.'

'But you liked it?' said Ursula magisterially.

'I liked it, oh, I liked it! It gave me a feeling such as nothing else ever did, but I never thought of its being love, he was so much older.'

'Older!' exclaimed Nuttie, much taken aback. 'Oh! as old as Mr. Dutton?'

'Mr. Dutton is thirty-six, I think. Yes, he was older than that.'

'Mother, how could you?' For to be older than Mr. Dutton seemed to the youthful fancy to be near decrepitude; but she added, 'I suppose he was very noble, and had done great things.'

'He was the grandest gentleman I ever saw, and had *such* a manner,' said the mother, passing over the latter suggestion. 'Any way, I never thought what it all meant—all alone with the children as I was—till I found people looking at me, and laughing at me, and then I heard Lady de Lyonnais and Mr. Egremont were coming down, very angry, to send me away. I ought, I know it now, to have waited, for they would have written to my aunt. But I was horribly frightened, and I couldn't bear to think of never seeing him again, and he came and comforted me, and said he would take me to Mrs. Houghton, the kind lady who was staying in the *Ninon*, and they would make it all square for me—and then—oh! it was very sweet—but I never knew that we were sailing away to Jersey to be married! I knew it was very dreadful without any one's leave, but it was so noble of him to take the poor little governess and defend her, and it wasn't as if my mother had been alive.

I didn't know Aunt Ursel then as I did afterwards. And Mrs. Houghton said there was nothing else to be done.'

'O don't leave off, mother. Do tell me. How long did you have him?'

'Six weeks then—and afterwards one fortnight at Dieppe. He was not free. He had an old uncle, General Egremont, who was sick and hot-tempered, and he was obliged to keep everything secret from him, and therefore from everybody else. And so I was to live at Dieppe, while he went out to take care of his uncle, and you know—you know——'

'Yes, I know, dear mother. But I am sure he was saving somebody else, and it was a noble death! And I know how Aunt Ursel came to Dieppe, and how I—your own little Frenchwoman—came to take care of you. And haven't we been jolly without any of these fine relations that never looked after you all this time! Besides, you know he is very likely to be on a lonely coral island, and will come home yet. I often think he is.'

'My dear child, I have been happier than I deserved,' said Alice Egremont, drying her eyes. 'But oh! Nuttie, I hope you will be a wiser woman than your mother.'

'Come, don't go on in that way! Why, I've such advantages! I've Miss Mary, and Aunt Ursel, and Mr. Spyers, and Mr. Dutton, and you, you poor little thing, had nobody! One good thing is, we shall get the water-soldier. Mr. Dutton needn't come, for he's

like a cat, and won't soil his boots, but Gerard is dying to get another look at the old ruin. He can't make up his mind about the cross on one of the stone-coffin lids, so he'll be delighted to come, and he'll get it out of the pond for us. I wonder when we can go. To-night is choir practice, and to-morrow is cutting-out day.'

Miss Headworth was not sorry that the small sociabilities of the friends did not leave her alone with her niece all that evening, or the next day, when there was a grand cutting-out for the working party,—an operation always performed in the holidays. Miss Headworth had of late years been excused from it, and it gave her the opportunity she wanted of a consultation with Mr. Dutton. He was her prime adviser in everything, from her investments (such as they were) to the eccentricities of her timepieces; and as the cuckoo-clock had that night cuckooed all the hours round in succession, no one thought it wonderful that she should send a twisted note entreating him to call as early as he could in the afternoon. Of course Nuttie's chatter had proclaimed the extraordinary visitors, and it needed not the old lady's dash under '*on an anxious affair*' to bring him to her little drawing-room as soon as he could quit his desk. Perhaps he hastened his work with a hope in his heart which he durst not express, but the agitation on the usually placid face forbade him to entertain it for an instant, and he only said, 'So our expedition has led to unforeseen consequences, Miss Headworth.' And then she answered under her breath, as if afraid of being overheard: 'Mr. Dutton,

my poor child does not know it yet, but the man is alive!'

Mr. Dutton compressed his lips. It was the greater shock, for he had actually made inquiries at the Yacht Club, but the officials there either had not been made aware of the reappearance of the two Egremonts, or they did not think it worth while to look beyond the record which declared that all hands had perished, and the connection of the uncle and nephew with the Yacht Club had not been renewed. Presently he said, 'Then hers was a right instinct. There is reason to be thankful.'

Miss Headworth was too full of her own anxieties to heed his causes for thankfulness. She told what she had heard from Lady Kirkaldy and from Mark Egremont, and asked counsel whether it could be Alice's duty to return to the man who had deserted her, or even to accept anything from him. There was an impetuous and indignant spirit at the bottom of the old lady's heart, in spite of the subdued life she had led for so many years, and she hardly brooked the measured considerate manner in which her adviser declared that all depended on circumstances, and the manner in which Captain Egremont made the first move. At present no one was acting but young Mark, and, as Mr. Dutton observed, it was not a matter in which a man was very likely to submit to a nephew's dictation.

There was certainly no need for Mrs. Egremont to *force* her presence on him. But Mr. Dutton did think

that for her own sake and her child's there ought to be full recognition of their rights, and that this should be proved by their maintenance.

'I imagine that Ursula may probably be a considerable heiress, and her rights must not be sacrificed.'

'Poor little girl! Will it be for her happiness? I doubt it greatly!'

'Of that I suppose we have no right to judge,' said Mr. Dutton, somewhat tremulously. 'Justice is what we have to look to, and to allow Nuttie to be passed over would be permitting a slur to be cast on her and her mother.'

'I see that,' said Miss Headworth, with an effort. 'I suppose I am after all a selfish, faithless old woman, and it is not in my hands after all. But I must prepare my poor Alice for what may be coming.'

'If any terms are offered to her, she had better put the matter into a lawyer's hands. Dobson would be a safe man to deal with.'

Miss Headworth was amazed that he—who had helped her in many a little question bordering on law—should not proffer his aid now in this greatest stress. He was a resolute, self-controlled man, and she never guessed at the feeling that made him judge himself to be no fitting champion for Alice Egremont against her husband. Ever since, ten years ago, he had learnt that his beautiful neighbour did not regard herself so certainly a widow as to venture to open her heart to any other love, he had lived patiently on, content to serve her as a trustworthy friend, and never betraying

the secret hope so long cherished and now entirely crushed.

He was relieved to escape from the interview, and the poor old lady remained a little more certain as to her duty perhaps, but with a certainty that only made her more unhappy, and she was so restless and nervous that, in the middle of the evening's reading of Archbishop Trench's *Lectures on History*, Alice suddenly broke off in the very middle of a sentence and exclaimed, 'Aunt Ursel! you are keeping something from me.'

Miss Headworth made a faint attempt by saying something about presently, and glancing with her eyes to indicate that it was to be reserved till after Nuttie's bedtime, but the young lady comprehended the signs and exclaimed, 'Never mind me, Aunt Ursel,—I know all about mother; she told me last night.'

'It is!' broke in Mrs. Egremont, who had been watching her aunt's face. 'You have heard of *him*.'

'Oh, my father! You really have!' cried Nuttie. 'Then he really was on the desert island all this time; I was quite sure of it. How delightful!' She jumped up and looked at the door, as if she expected to see him appear that instant, clad in skins like Robinson Crusoe, but her aunt's nervous agitation found vent in a sharp reproof: 'Nuttie, hold your tongue, and don't be such a foolish child, or I shall send you out of the room this instant!'

'But aunt?' gasped Alice, unable to bear the suspense.

'Yes, my poor dear child, Captain Egremont with the General got off with some of the crew in a boat when the *Ninon* was burnt. He spent a good many years abroad with the old man, but he has now inherited the family place, and is living there.' Miss Headworth felt as if she had fired a cannon and looked to see the effect.

'Ah, if we could have stayed at Dieppe!' said Mrs. Egremont. 'But we did write back to say where we could be heard of.'

'That was of no use. Mark found no traces of us when he went thither.'

'Did *he* send Mark?'

'No. My dear Alice, I must not conceal from you that this is all Mr. Mark Egremont's doing. He seems to have been helping his uncle with his papers when he came on the evidence of your marriage, and, remembering you as he does, he forced the confession of it from the captain, and of his own accord set forth to discover what had become of you and to see justice done to you.'

'Dear little Mark!' said she; 'he always was such an affectionate little boy.'

'And now, my dear, you must consider how you will receive any advances on his part.'

'Oh, Aunt Ursel, don't! I can't talk now. Please let me go to bed. Nuttie, dear, you need not come yet.'

The desire for solitude, in which to realise what she had heard, was overpowering, and she fled away in

the summer twilight, leaving Nuttie with wide open eyes, looking after her vanished hero and desert island.

'My poor Alice!' sighed the old lady.

'Aunt Ursel!' exclaimed Nuttie, 'was—I mean—is my father a good or a bad man?'

'My dear, should a daughter ask such a question?'

'Aunt Ursel, I can't help it. I think I ought to know all about it,' said Nuttie gravely, putting away her childishness and sitting down by her aunt. 'I did not think so much of it when mother told me they eloped, because, though I know it was very wrong, people *do* do odd things sometimes when they are very much in love (she said it in a superior patronising tone that would have amused Miss Headworth very much at any other time); and it has not spoilt mother for being the dearest, sweetest, best thing in the world, and, besides, they had neither of them any fathers or mothers to disobey. But, then, when I found he was so old, and that he kept it a secret, and must have told stories only for the sake of *money* (uttered with extreme contempt), I didn't like it. And if he left her as Theseus left Ariadne, or Sir Lancelot left Elaine, I—I don't think it is nice. Do you think he only pretended to be lost in the *Ninon* to get rid of her, or that he could not find her?'

'The *Ninon* was really reported lost with all on board,' said Miss Headworth. 'That was ascertained. He was saved by a Chilian ship, and seems to have been a good while making his way back to Europe. I had taken care that our address should be known at

Dieppe, but it is quite possible that he may not have applied to the right people, or that they may not have preserved my letter, so that we cannot feel sure that he was to blame.'

'If he had been worth anything at all, he would have moved heaven and earth to find her!' cried Nuttie; 'and you said yourself it was all *that* Mark's doing!'

'He seems to be a very upright and generous young man, that Mr. Mark Egremont,' said Miss Headworth, a whole romance as to Nuttie's future destiny sweeping across her mind in an instant, with a mental dispensation to first cousins in such a case. 'I think you will find him a staunch champion even against his own interests.'

Perceptions came across Nuttie. 'Oh, then I am a sort of lost heiress, like people in a story! I see! But, Aunt Ursel, what do you think will happen?'

'My dear child, I cannot guess in the least. Perhaps the Egremont property will not concern you, and only go to male heirs. That would be the best thing, since in any case you must be sufficiently provided for. Your father must do that.'

'But about mother?'

'A proper provision must be insisted on for her,' said Miss Headworth. 'It is no use, however, to speculate on the future. We cannot guess how Mr. Mark Egremont's communication will be received, or whether any wish will be expressed for your mother's rejoining your father. In such a case the terms must

be distinctly understood, and I have full trust both in Mr. Mark and in Lady Kirkaldy as her champions to see that justice is done to you both.'

'I'm sure he doesn't deserve that mother should go to him.'

'Nor do I expect that he will wish it, or that it would be proper; but he is bound to give her a handsome maintenance, and I think most probably you will be asked to stay with your uncle and cousins,' said Miss Headworth, figuring to herself a kind of Newstead Abbey or some such scene of constant orgies at Bridgefield Egremont.

'I shall accept nothing from the family that does not include mother,' said Nuttie.

'Dear child, I foresee many trials, but you must be her protector.'

'That I will,' said Nuttie; and in the gallant purpose she went to bed, to find her mother either asleep or feigning slumber with tears on her cheek.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WATER-SOLDIER.

'Presumptuous maid, with looks intent,
Again she stretched, again she bent,
Nor knew the gulf between.'—GRAY.

IT all seemed like a dream to Ursula, perhaps likewise to her mother, when they rose to the routine of daily life with the ordinary interests of the day before them. There was a latent unwillingness in Mrs. Egremont's mind to discuss the subject with either aunt or daughter; and when the post brought no letter, Ursula, after a moment's sense of flatness, was relieved, and returned to her eager desire to hurry after the water-soldier. It was feasible that very afternoon. Mary Nugent came in with the intelligence.

'And can Gerard come? or we shall only look at it.'

'Yes, Gerard can come, and so will Mr. Dutton,' said Mary, who, standing about half-way between Mrs. Egremont and her daughter, did not think herself quite a sufficient chaperon.

'He will look on like a hen at her ducklings,' said Nuttie. 'It is cruel to take him, poor man!'

'Meantime, Nuttie, do you like an hour of *Marie Stuart?*'

'Oh, thank you!' But she whispered, 'Aunt Ursel, may I tell her?'

'Ask your mother, my dear.'

Leave was given, half reluctantly, and with a prohibition against mentioning the subject to any one else, but both mother and aunt had confidence in Mary Nugent's wisdom and discretion, so the two friends sat on the wall together, and Ursula poured out her heart. Poor little girl! she was greatly discomfited at the vanishing of her noble vision of the heroic self-devoted father, and ready on the other hand to believe him a villain, like Bertram Risingham, or 'the Pirate,' being possessed by this idea on account of his West Indian voyages. At any rate, she was determined not to be accepted or acknowledged without her mother, and was already rehearsing magnanimous letters of refusal. Miss Mary listened and wondered, feeling sometimes as if this were as much a romance as the little yacht going down with the burning ship; and then came back the recollection that there was a real fact that Nuttie had a father, and that it was entirely uncertain what part he might take, or what the girl might be called on to do. Considering anxiously these bearings of the question, she scarcely heard what she was required to assent to, in one of Nuttie's eager, 'Don't you think so?'

'My dear Nuttie,' she said, rousing herself, 'what I do think is that it will all probably turn out exactly contrariwise to our imaginations, so I believe it would

be wisest to build up as few fancies as possible, but only to pray that you may have a right judgment in all things, and have strength to do what is right, whatever you may see that to be.'

'And of course that will be to stick by mother.'

'There can be little doubt of that, but the how? No, dear, do not let us devise all sorts of *hows* when we have nothing to go upon. That would be of no use, and only perplex you when the time comes. It would be much better to "do the nexte thinge," and read our *Marie Stuart*.'

Nuttie pouted a little, but submitted, though she now and then broke into a translation with 'You know mother will never stand up for herself,' or 'They think I shall be asked to stay with the Egremonts, but I must work up for the exam.'

However, the school habit of concentrating her attention prevailed, and the study quieted Nuttie's excitement. The expedition took place as arranged. There was a train which stopped so that the party could go down by it, and the distance was not too great for walking back.

Mr. Dutton met them on the platform, well armed with his neat silk umbrella, and his black poodle, Monsieur, trotting solemnly after him. Gerard Godfrey bore materials for an exact transcript of the Abbot's monumental cross, his head being full of church architecture, while Nuttie carried a long green tin case, or vasculum as she chose to call it, with her three vowels, U A E, and the stars of the Little Bear conspicuously painted on it in white.

'You did not venture on that the other day,' said Mr. Dutton. 'How much of the park do you mean to carry away in it?'

'Let me take it,' said Gerard politely.

'No, thank you. You'd leave it behind, while you were pottering over the mouldings.'

'You are much more likely to leave it behind yourself.'

'What—with my soldier, my *Stratiotes,* in it? I think I see myself.'

'Give it to me,' said Gerard. 'Of course I can't see you carrying a great thing like that.'

'Can't you, indeed?'

'Gently, gently, my dear,' said Miss Mary, as the young people seemed very near a skirmish, and the train was sweeping up. Then there was another small scuffle, for Nuttie had set her heart on the third class; but Mr. Dutton had taken second-class tickets, and was about to hand them into a carriage whence there had just emerged a very supercilious black-moustached valet, who was pulling out a leather-covered dressing-case, while Gerard was consoling Nuttie by telling her that Monsieur never deigned to go third class.

'It is a smoking carriage,' said Miss Nugent, on the step. 'Pah! how it smells,' as she jumped back.

'Beautiful backy—a perfect nosegay,' said Gerard. 'Trust that fellow for having the best.'

'His master's, no doubt,' suggested Mr. Dutton.

'You'd better go in it, to enjoy his reversion,' said Nuttie.

'And where's my escort, then?'

'Oh, I'm sure we don't want you.'

'Nuttie, my dear,' expostulated Miss Nugent, dragging her into the next carriage.

'You may enjoy the fragrance still,' said Nuttie when seated. 'Do you see—there's the man's master; he has stood him up against that post, with his cigar, to wait while he gets out the luggage. I daresay you can get a whiff if you lean out far enough.'

'I say! that figure is a study!' said Gerard. 'What is it that he is so like?'

'Oh! I know,' said Nuttie. 'It is Lord Frederick Verisopht, and the bad gentlefolks in the pictures to the old numbers of Dickens that you have got, Miss Mary. Now isn't he? Look! only Lord Frederick wasn't fat.'

Nuttie was in a state of excitement that made her peculiarly unmanageable, and Miss Nugent was very grateful to Mr. Dutton for his sharp though general admonition against staring, while, under pretext of disposing of the umbrella and the vasculum, he stood up, so as to block the window till they were starting.

There was no one else to observe them but a demure old lady, and in ten minutes' time they were in open space, where high spirits might work themselves off, though the battle over the botanical case was ended by Miss Nugent, who strongly held that ladies should carry their own extra encumbrances, and slung it with a scarf over Nuttie's shoulders in a knowing knapsack fashion.

The two young people had known one another all

their lives, for Gerard was the son of a medical man who had lived next door to Miss Headworth when the children were young. The father was dead, and the family had left the place, but this son had remained at school, and afterwards had been put into the office at the umbrella factory under charge of Mr. Dutton, whose godson he was, and who treated him as a nephew. He was a good-hearted, steady young fellow, with his whole interest in ecclesiastical details, wearing a tie in accordance with 'the colours,' and absorbed in church music and decorations, while his recreations were almost all in accordance therewith.

There was plenty of merriment, as he drew and measured at the very scanty ruins, which were little more than a few fragments of wall, overgrown luxuriantly with ivy and clematis, but enclosing some fine old coffin-lids with floriated crosses, interesting to those who cared for architecture and church history, as Mr. Dutton tried to make the children do, so that their ecclesiastical feelings might be less narrow, and stand on a surer foundation than present interest, a slightly aggressive feeling of contempt for all the other town churches, and a pleasing sense of being persecuted.

They fought over the floriations and mouldings with great zest, and each maintained a date with youthful vigour—both being, as Mr. Dutton by and by showed them, long before the foundation. The pond had been left to the last with a view to the well-being of the water-soldier on the return. Here the difficulties of the capture were great, for the nearest

plant flourished too far from the bank to be reached with comfort, and besides, the sharp-pointed leaves to which it owes its name were not to be approached with casual grasps.

'Oh Monsieur, I wish you were a Beau,' sighed Nuttie. 'Why, are you too stupid to go and get it?'

'It is a proof of his superior intelligence,' said Mr. Dutton.

'But really it is too ridiculous—too provoking—to have come all this way and not get it,' cried the tantalised Nuttie. 'Oh, Gerard, are you taking off your boots and stockings? You duck!'

'Just what I wish I was,' said the youth, rolling up his trousers.

But even the paddling in did not answer. Mr. Dutton called out anxiously, 'Take care, Gerard, the bottom may be soft,' and came down to the very verge just in time to hold out his hand, and prevent an utterly disastrous fall, for Gerard, in spite of his bare feet, sank at once into mud, and on the first attempt to take a step forward, found his foot slipping away from under him, and would in another instant have tumbled backwards into the slush and weeds. He scrambled back, his hat falling off into the reeds, and splashing Mr. Dutton all over, while Monsieur began to bark 'with astonishment at seeing his master in such a plight,' declared the ladies, who stood convulsed with cruel laughter.

'Isn't it dreadful?' exclaimed Ursula.

'Well! It might have been worse,' gravely said

Mr. Dutton, wiping off the more obnoxious of his splashes with his pocket handkerchief.

'Oh I didn't mean you, but the water-soldier,' said Nuttie. 'To have come five miles for it in vain!'

'I don't know what to suggest,' added Gerard. 'Even if the ladies were to retire——'

'No, no,' interposed Mr. Dutton, ''tis no swimming ground, and I forbid the expedient. You would only be entangled in the weeds.'

'Behold!' exclaimed Mary, who had been prowling about the banks, and now held up in triumph one of the poles with a bill-hook at the end used for cutting weed.

'Bravo, Miss Nugent!' cried Gerard.

'Female wit has circumvented the water-soldier,' said Mr. Dutton.

'Don't cry out too soon,' returned Mary; 'the soldier may float off and escape you yet.'

However, the capture was safely accomplished, without even a dip under water to destroy the beauty of the white flowers. With these, and a few water-lilies secured by Gerard for the morrow's altar vases, the party set out on their homeward walk, through plantations of whispering firs, the low sun tinging the trunks with ruddy light; across heathery commons, where crimson heath abounded, and the delicate blush-coloured wax-belled species was a prize; by cornfields in ear hanging out their dainty stamens; along hedges full of exquisite plumes of feathering or nodding grass, of which Nuttie made bouquets and botanical studies,

and Gerard stored for harvest decorations. They ran and danced on together with Monsieur at their heels, while the elders watched them with some sadness and anxiety. Free-masonry had soon made both Mary and Mr. Dutton aware of each other's initiation, and they had discussed the matter in all its bearings, agreed that the man was a scoundrel, and the woman an angel, even if she had once been weak, and that she ought to be very resolute with him if he came to terms. And then they looked after their young companions, and Mr. Dutton said, 'Poor children, what is before them?'

'It is well they are both so young,' answered Mary.

CHAPTER VII.

THAT MAN.

'It is the last time—'tis the last!'—Scott.

Sundays were the ever-recurring centres of work and interests to the little circle in St. Ambrose's Road. To them the church services and the various classes and schools were the great objects and excitements of the week. A certain measure of hopeful effort and varying success is what gives zest to life, and the purer and higher the aim, and the more unmixed the motives, the greater the happiness achieved by the 'something attempted, something done.'

Setting apart actual spiritual devotion, the altar vases, purchased by a contribution of careful savings, and adorned with the Monks Horton lilies, backed by ferns from the same quarter; the surplices made by the ladies themselves, the chants they had practised, the hymns they had taught, could not but be much more interesting to them than if they had been mere lookers on. Every cross on the markers, every flower on the altar cloth was the work of one or other of

them; everything in the church was an achievement, and choir boys, school children, Bible classes, every member of the regular congregation, had some special interest; nay, every irregular member or visitor might be a convert in time—if not a present sympathiser, and at the very least might swell the offertory that was destined to so many needs of the struggling district.

Thus it was with some curiosity mingled with self-reproach that Nuttie, while singing her *Benedictus* among the tuneful shop-girls, to whom she was bound to set an example, became aware of yesterday's first-class traveller lounging, as far as the rows of chairs would permit, in the aisle, and, as she thought, staring hard at her mother. It was well that Mrs. Egremont's invariable custom was never to lift her eyes from her book or her harmonium, or she surely must have been disconcerted, her daughter thought, by the eyes that must have found her out, under her little black net bonnet and veil, as the most beautiful woman in church,—as she certainly was,—even that fine good-for-nothing gentleman thinking so. Nuttie would add his glances to the glories of her lovely mother!

And she did so, with triumph in her tone of reprobation, as she trotted off, after the early dinner, to her share of Sunday-school work as usual under Miss Nugent's wing. It began with a children's service, and then ensued, in rooms at the factory, lent by Mr. Dutton, the teaching that was to supply the omissions

of the Board School; the establishment of a voluntary one being the next ambition of St. Ambrose's.

Coming home from their labours, in the fervent discussion of their scholars, and exchanging remarks and greetings with the other teachers of various calibres, the friends reached their own road, and there, to their amazement, beheld Miss Headworth.

'Yes, it really is!' cried Nuttie. 'We can't be too late? No—there's no bell! Aunt Ursel! What has brought you out? What's the matter? Where's mother?'

'In the house. My dear,' catching hold of her, and speaking breathlessly, 'I came out to prepare you. He is come—your father——'

'Where?' cried Nuttie, rather wildly.

'He is in the drawing-room with your mother. I said I would send you.' Poor Miss Headworth gasped with agitation. 'Oh! where's Mr. Dutton—not that anything can be done——'

'Is it *that man?*' asked Nuttie, and getting no answer, 'I know it is! Oh Aunt Ursel, how could you leave her with him? I must go and protect her. Gerard—come. No, go and fetch Mr. Dutton.'

'Hush! hush, Nuttie,' cried her aunt, grasping her. 'You know nothing about it. Wait here till I can tell you.'

'Come in here, dear Miss Headworth,' said Mary, gently drawing her arm into hers, for the poor old lady could hardly stand for trembling, and bidding Gerard open the door of her own house with the latch-key.

She took them into the dining-room, so as not to disturb her mother, sent Gerard off after Mr. Dutton in the very uttermost astonishment and bewilderment, and set Miss Headworth down in an easy-chair, where she recovered herself, under Mary's soothing care, enough to tell her story in spite of Nuttie's exclamations. 'Wait! wait, Nuttie! You mustn't burst in on them so! No, you need not be afraid. Don't be a silly child! He won't hurt her! Oh no! They are quite delighted to meet.'

'Delighted to meet?' said Nuttie, as if transfixed.

'Yes,' said her aunt. 'Oh yes, I always knew the poor child cared for him and tried to believe in him all along. He only had to say the word.'

'I wouldn't,' cried the girl, her eyes flashing. 'Why didn't you ask him how he could desert her and leave her?'

'My dear! how can one come between husband and wife? Oh, my poor Alice!'

'How was it, how did they meet, dear Miss Headworth?' asked Mary, administering the wine she had been pouring out.

'You hadn't been gone half an hour, Alice was reading to me, and I was just dozing, when in came Louisa. "A gentleman to see Mrs. Egremont," she said, and there he was just behind. We rose up—she did not know him at once, but he just said "Edda, my little Edda, sweeter than ever, I knew you at once," or something of that sort, and she gave one little cry of "I knew you would come," and sprang

right into his arms. I—well, I meant to make him understand how he had treated her, but just as I began "Sir"—he came at me with his hand outstretched——"

'You didn't take it, aunt, I hope?' cried Nuttie.

'My dear, when you see him, you will know how impossible it is. He *has* that high-bred manner it is as if he were conferring a favour. "Miss Headworth, I conclude," said he, "a lady to whom I owe more than I can express." Just as if I had done it for his sake.' Miss Nugent felt this open expression dangerous on account of the daughter, and she looked her consternation at Mr. Dutton, who had quietly entered, ruthlessly shutting Gerard Godfrey out with only such a word of explanation as could be given on the way.

'Then he comes with—with favourable intentions,' said Mary, putting as much admonition as she could into her voice.

'Oh! no doubt of that,' said Miss Headworth, drawing herself together. 'He spoke of the long separation,—said he had never been able to find her, till the strange chance of his nephew stumbling on her at Abbots Norton.'

'That is—possib—probably true,' said Mr. Dutton.

'It can't be,' broke in Nuttie. 'He never troubled himself about it till his nephew found the papers. You said so, Aunt Ursel! He is a dreadful traitor of a man, just like Marmion, or Theseus, or Lancelot, and now he is telling lies about it! Don't look at

me, Aunt Ursel, they are lies, and I *will* say it, and he took in poor dear mother once, and now he is taking her in again, and I can't bear that he should be my father!'

It was so entirely true, yet so shocking to hear from her mouth, that all three stood aghast, as she stood with heaving chest, crimson cheeks, and big tears in her eyes. Miss Headworth only muttered, 'Oh, my poor child, you mustn't!'

Mr. Dutton prevented another passionate outburst by his tone of grave, gentle authority. 'Listen a moment, Ursula,' he said. 'It is unhappily true that this man has acted in an unjustifiable way towards your mother and yourself. But there are, no doubt, many more excuses for him than you know of, and as I found a few years ago that the people at Dieppe had lost the address that had been left with them, he must have found no traces of your mother there. You cannot understand the difficulties that may have been in his way. And there is no use, quite the contrary, in making the worst of him. He has found your mother out, and it seems that he claims her affectionately, and she forgives and welcomes him—out of the sweet tenderness of her heart.'

'She may—but I can't,' murmured Nuttie.

'That is not a fit thing for a daughter, nor a Christian, to say,' Mr. Dutton sternly said.

''Tis not for myself—'tis for her,' objected Nuttie.

'That's nonsense; a mere excuse,' he returned. 'You have nothing at all to forgive, since he did not

know you were in existence. And as to your mother, whom you say you put first, what greater grief or pain can you give her than by showing enmity and resentment against her husband, when she, the really injured person, loves and forgives ?'

'He's a bad man. If she goes back to him, I know he will make her unhappy——'

'You don't know any such thing, but you do know that your opposition will make her unhappy. Remember, there's no choice in the matter. He has legal rights over you both, and since he shows himself ready (as I understand from Miss Headworth that he is) to give her and you your proper position, you have nothing to do but to be thankful. I think myself that it is a great subject of thankfulness that your mother can return so freely without any bitterness. It is the blessing of such as she——'

Nuttie stood pouting, but more thoughtful and less violent, as she said, 'How can I be thankful ? I don't want position or anything. I only want him to let my—my own mother, and aunt, and me alone.'

'Child, you are talking of what you do not understand. You must not waste any more time in argument. Your mother has sent for you, and it is your duty to go and let her introduce you to your father. I have little doubt that you will find him very unlike all your imagination represents him, but let that be as it may, the fifth Commandment does not say, "Honour only thy good father," but, "Honour thy father." Come now, put on your gloves—get her hat right, if

you please, Miss Mary. There—now, come along, be a reasonable creature, and a good girl, and do not give unnecessary pain and vexation to your mother.' He gave her his arm, and led her away.

'Well done, Mr. Dutton!' exclaimed Miss Nugent.

'Poor Mr. Dutton!' All Aunt Ursel's discretion could not suppress that sigh, but Mary prudently let it pass unnoticed, only honouring in her heart the unselfishness and self-restraint of the man whose long, patient, unspoken hopes had just received a death-blow.

'Oh, Mary! I never thought it would have been like this!' cried the poor old lady. 'I ought not to have spoken as I did before the child, but I was so taken by surprise! Alice turned to him just as if he had been the most faithful, loving husband in the world. She is believing every word he says.'

'It is very happy for her that she can,' pleaded Mary.

'So it is, yes, but—when one knows what he is, and what she is! Oh, Mr. Dutton, is the poor child gone in?'

'Yes, I saw her safe into the room. She was very near running off up the stairs,' said Mr. Dutton. 'But I daresay she is fascinated by this time. That sort of man has great power over women.'

'Nuttie is hardly a woman yet,' said Miss Nugent.

'No, but there must be a strong reaction, when she sees something unlike her compound of Marmion and Theseus.'

'I suppose there is no question but that they must go with him!' said Miss Headworth wistfully.

'Assuredly. You say he—this Egremont—was affectionate,' said Mr. Dutton quietly, but Mary saw his fingers white with his tight clenching of the bar of the chair.

'Oh yes, warmly affectionate, delighted to find her prettier than ever, poor dear; I suppose he meant it. Heaven forgive me, if I am judging him too hardly, but I verily believe he went to church to reconnoitre, and see whether she pleased his fancy——'

'And do you understand,' added Mr. Dutton, 'that he is prepared to do her full justice, and introduce her to his family and friends as his wife, on equal terms? Otherwise, even if she were unwilling to stand up for herself, it would be the duty of her friends to make some stipulations.'

'I am pretty sure that he does,' said the aunt; 'I did not stay long when I saw that I was not wanted, but I heard him say something about his having a home for her now, and her cutting out the Redcastle ladies.'

'Besides, there is the nephew, Mr. Mark Egremont,' said Mary. 'He will take care of her.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Dutton. 'It appears to be all right. At any rate, there can be no grounds for interference on our part.'

Mr. Dutton took his leave with these words, wringing Miss Headworth's hand in mute sympathy, and she, poor old lady, when he was gone, fairly collapsed

into bitter weeping over the uncertain future of those whom she had loved as her own children, and who now must leave her desolate. Mary did her best with comfort and sympathy, and presently took her to share her griefs and fears with gentle old Mrs. Nugent.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FATHER.

'I do think this lady
To be my child.'—*King Lear.*

NUTTIE, in her fresh holland Sunday dress, worked in crewels with wild strawberries by her mother's hands, and with a white-trimmed straw hat, was almost shoved into the little drawing-room by Mr. Dutton, though he was himself invisible.

Her eyes were in such a daze of tears that she hardly saw more at first than that some one was there with her mother on the sofa. 'Ah, there she is!' she heard her mother cry, and both rose. Her mother's arm was round her waist, her hand was put into another, Mrs. Egremont's voice, tremulous with exceeding delight, said, 'Our child, our Ursula, our Nuttie! Oh, this is what I have longed for all these years! Oh, thanks, thanks!' and her hands left her daughter to be clasped and uplifted for a moment in fervent thanksgiving, while Nuttie's hand was held, and a strange hairy kiss, redolent of tobacco-smoking,

was on her forehead—a masculine one, such as she had never known, except her cousin Mark's, since the old rector died, and she had grown too big for Mr. Dutton's embraces. It was more strange than delightful, and yet she felt the polish of the tone that said, 'We make acquaintance somewhat late, Ursula, but better late than never.'

She looked up at this new father, and understood instantly what she had heard of his being a grand gentleman. There was a high-bred look about him, an entire ease and perfect manner that made everything he did or said seem like gracious condescension, and took away the power of questioning it at the moment. He was not above the middle size, and was becoming unwieldy; but there was something imposing and even graceful in his deportment, and his bald narrow forehead looked aristocratic, set off between side tufts of white hair, white whiskers, and moustaches waxed into sharp points, Victor Emmanuel fashion, and a round white curly beard. His eyes were dark, and looked dull, with yellow unwholesome corners, and his skin was not of a pleasant colour, but still, with all Nuttie's intentions of regarding him with horror, she was subdued, partly by the grand breeding and air of distinction, and partly by the current of sympathy from her mother's look of perfect happiness and exultation. She could not help feeling it a favour, almost an undeserved favour, that so great a personage should say, 'A complete Egremont, I see. She has altogether the family face.'

'I am so glad you think so,' returned her mother.

'On the whole it is well, but she might have done better to resemble you, Edda,' he said caressingly; 'but perhaps that would have been *too* much for the Earlsforth natives. William's girls will have enough to endure without a double eclipse!' and he laughed.

'I—I don't want——' faltered the mother.

'You don't want, no, but you can't help it,' he said, evidently with a proud delight in her beauty. 'Now that I have seen the child,' he added, 'I will make my way back to the hotel.'

'Will you—won't you stay to tea or dinner?' said his wife, beginning with an imploring tone which hesitated as she reviewed possible chops and her aunt's dismay.

'Thank you, I have ordered dinner at the hotel,' he answered, 'and Gregorio is waiting for me with a cab. No doubt you will wish to make arrangements with Madame—the old lady—and I will not trouble her further to-night. I will send down Gregorio to-morrow morning, to tell you what I arrange. An afternoon train, probably, as we shall go no farther than London. You say Lady Kirkaldy called on you. We might return her visit before starting, but I will let you know when I have looked at the trains. My compliments to Miss Headworth. Good evening, sweetest.' He held his wife in a fond embrace, kissing her brow and cheeks and letting her cling to him, then added, 'Good evening, little one,' with a good-natured careless gesture with which Nuttie was quite

content, for she had a certain loathing of the caresses that so charmed her mother. And yet the command to make ready had been given with such easy authority that the idea of resisting it had never even entered her mind, though she stood still while her mother went out to the door with him and watched him to the last.

Coming back, she threw her arms round her daughter, kissed her again and again, and, with showers of the glad tears long repressed, cried, 'Oh, my Nuttie, my child, what joy! How shall I be thankful enough! Your father, your dear father! Now it is all right.' Little sentences of ecstasy such as these, interspersed with caresses, all in the incoherence of overpowering delight, full of an absolute faith that the lost husband had loved her and been pining for her all these years, but that he had been unable to trace her, and was as happy as she was in the reunion.

The girl was somewhat bewildered, but she was carried along by this flood of exceeding joy and gladness. The Marmion and Theseus images had been dispelled by the reality, and, with Mr. Dutton's sharp reproof fresh upon her, she felt herself to have been doing a great injustice to her father; believed all that her mother did, and found herself the object of a romantic recognition—if not the beggar girl become a princess, at any rate, the little school-teacher a county lady! And she had never seen her mother so wildly, overpoweringly happy with joy. That made her too, feel that something grand and glorious had happened.

'What are we going to do?' she asked, as the vehemence of Mrs. Egremont's emotion began to work itself off.

'Home! He takes us to his home! *His* home!' repeated her mother, in a trance of joy, as the yearnings of her widowed heart now were fulfilled.

'Oh, but Aunt Ursel!'

'Poor Aunt Ursel! Oh, Nuttie, Nuttie, I had almost forgotten! How could I?' and there was a shower of tears of compunction. 'But he said he owed everything to her! She will come with us! Or if she doesn't live with us, we will make her live close by in a dear little cottage. Where is she? When did she go? I never saw her go.'

The sound of the front door was heard, for the visitor had been watched away and Miss Headworth was returning to her own house to be there received with another fervent gush of happiness, much more trying to her, poor thing, than to Nuttie.

There was even-song imminent, and the most needful act at the moment was to compose the harmonium-player sufficiently for her to take her part. Miss Headworth was really glad of the necessity, since it put off the discussion, and made a reason for silencing Nuttie until all should be more recovered from the first agitation. Alice Egremont herself was glad to carry her gratitude and thankfulness to the Throne of Grace, and in her voluntary, and all her psalms, there was an exulting strain that no one had thought the instrument capable of producing, and that went to

the heart of more than one of her hearers. No one who knew her could doubt that hers was simply innocent exultation in the recovery of him whom she so entirely loved and confided in. But there could not but be terrible doubts whether he were worthy of that trust, and what the new page in her life would be.

Miss Headworth had said they would not talk till after church, but there was no deferring the matter then. She was prepared, however, when her niece came up to her in a tender deprecating manner, saying, 'Aunt Ursel, dear Aunt Ursel, it does seem very ungrateful, but——'

'He is going to take you away? Yes, I saw that. And it ought to be, my dear. You know where?'

'Yes; to London first, to be fitted out, and then to his own home. To Bridgefield Egremont. I shall have to see Mr. Egremont,' and her voice sank with shame. 'But Mark will be good to me, and why should I care when I have him.'

'It is quite right. I am glad it should be so,' firmly said the old lady.

'And yet to leave you so suddenly.'

'That can't be helped.'

'And it will only be for a little while,' she added, 'till you can make arrangements to come to us. My dear husband says he owes you everything. So you must be with us, or close to us.'

'My dear, it's very dear and good of you to think of it, but I must be independent.' She put it in those words, unwilling again to speak unguardedly before Nuttie.

'Oh, dear auntie, indeed you must! Think what you are to us, and what you have done for us. We can't go away to be happy and prosperous and leave you behind. Can we, Nuttie? Come and help me to get her to promise. Do—do dearest auntie,' and she began the coaxing and caressing natural to her, but Nuttie did not join in it, and Miss Headworth shook her head and said gravely—

'Don't Alice. It is of no use. I tell you once for all that my mind is made up.'

Alice, knowing by long experience that, when her aunt spoke in that tone, persuasion was useless, desisted, but looked at her in consternation, with eyes swimming in tears. Nuttie understood her a little better, and felt the prickings of distrust again.

'But aunt, dear aunt, how can we leave you? What will you do with all the boarders,' went on Mrs. Egremont.

'I shall see my way, my dear. Do not think about that. It is a great thing to see you and this child receive justice.'

'And only think, after all the hard things that have been said of him, that we should meet first at church! He would not wait and send letters and messages by Mark. You see he came down himself the first moment. I always knew he would. Only I am so sorry for him, that he should have lost all those sweet years when Nuttie was a tiny child. She must do all she can to make up to him.'

'Oh dear!' broke out Nuttie. 'It is so strange! It will be all so strange!'

'It will be a very new life,' said her aunt, rather didactically; 'but you must do your best to be a good daughter, and to fill your new position, and I have no doubt you will enjoy it.'

'If I could but take all with me!' said Nuttie. 'Oh dear! whatever will you do, Aunt Ursel? Oh mother, the choir! Who will play the harmonium? and who will lead the girls? and whatever will Mr. Spyers do? and who will take my class? Mother, couldn't we stay a little longer to set things going here?'

'It is nice of you to have thought of it, my dear,' said Mrs. Egremont, 'but your father would not like to stay on here.

'But mightn't I stay, just a few days, mother, to wish everybody good-bye? Mr. Dutton, and Miss Mary, and Gerard, and all the girls?'

There was some consolation in this plan, and the three women rested on it that night, Mrs. Egremont recovering composure enough to write three or four needful notes, explaining her sudden departure. The aunt *could* not talk of a future she so much dreaded for her nieces, losing in it the thought of her own loneliness; Alice kept back her own loving, tender, undoubting joy with a curious sense that it was hard and ungrateful towards the aunt; but it was impossible to think of that, and Nuttie was in many moods.

Eager anticipation of the new unseen world beyond, exultation in finding herself somebody, sympathy with her mother's happiness, all had their share, but

they made her all the wilder, because they were far from unmixed. The instinctive dislike of Mr. Egremont's countenance, and doubt of his plausible story, which had vanished before his presence, and her mother's faith, returned upon her from time to time, caught perhaps from her aunt's tone and looks. Then her aunt had been like a mother to her—her own mother much more like a sister, and the quitting her was a wrench not compensated for as in Mrs. Egremont's case by a more absorbing affection. Moreover, Nuttie felt sure that poor Gerard Godfrey would break his heart. As the mother and daughter for the last time lay down together in the room that had been theirs through the seventeen years of the girl's life, Alice fell asleep with a look of exquisite peace and content on her face, feeling her long term of trial crowned by unlooked-for joy, while Ursula, though respecting her slumbers too much to move, lay with wide-open eyes, now speculating on the strange future, now grieving over those she left—Aunt Ursel, Gerard, Mary, and all such; the schemes from which she was snatched, and then again consoling herself with the hope that, since she was going to be rich, she could at once give all that was wanted—the white altar cloth, the brass pitcher—nay, perhaps finish the church and build the school! For had not some one said something about her position? Oh yes, she had not thought of it before, but, since she was the elder brother's daughter, she must be the heiress! There was no doubt a grand beautiful story before her; she

would withstand all sorts of fascinations, wicked baronets and earls innumerable, and come back and take Gerard by the hand, and say, 'Pride was quelled and love was free.' Not that Gerard had ever uttered a word tending in that direction since he had been seven years old, but that would make it all the prettier; they would both be silently constant, till the time came, perhaps when she was of age. Mother would like it, though *that* father would certainly be horrid. And how nice it would be to give Gerard everything, and they would go all over the Continent, and see pictures, and buy them, and see all the cathedrals and all the mountains. But perhaps, since Mark Egremont had really been so generous in hunting up the cousin who was displacing him, she was bound in duty to marry him; perhaps he reckoned on her doing so. She would be generous in her turn, give up all the wealth to him, and return to do and be everything to Micklethwayte. How they would admire and bless her. And oh! she was going to London to-morrow—London, which she so much wished to see—Westminster Abbey, British Museum, All Saints, National Gallery, no end of new dresses.

Half-waking, half-dreaming, she spent the night which seemed long enough, and the light hours of the summer morning seemed still longer, before she could call it a reasonable time for getting up. Her splashings awoke her mother, who lay smiling for a few moments, realising and giving thanks for her great joy, then bestirred herself with the recollection of all

that had to be done on this busy morning before any summons from her husband could arrive.

Combining packing and dressing, like the essentially unmethodical little woman she was, Mrs. Egremont still had all her beautiful silky brown hair about her shoulders when the bell of St. Ambrose's was heard giving its thin tinkling summons to matins at half-past seven. She was disappointed; she meant to have gone for this last time, but there was no help for it, and Nuttie set off by herself.

Gerard Godfrey was at his own door. He was not one of the regular attendants at the short service, being of that modern species that holds itself superior to 'Cranmer's prayers,' but on this morning he hastened up to her with outstretched hand.

'And you are going away!' he said.

'I hope to get leave to stay a few days after mother,' she said.

'To prolong the torment?' he said.

'To wish everybody good-bye. It is a great piece of my life that is come to an end, and I can't bear to break it off so short.'

'And if you feel so, who are going to wealth and pleasure, what must it be to those who are left behind?'

'Oh!' said Nuttie, 'some one will be raised up. That's what they always say.'

'I shall go into a brotherhood,' observed Gerard desperately.

'Oh, don't,' began Nuttie, much gratified, but at

that moment Miss Nugent came out at her door, and Mr. Spyers, who was some way in advance, looked round and waited for them to come up. He held out his hands to her and said, 'Well, Nuttie, my child, you are going to begin a new life.'

'Oh dear! I wish I could have both!' cried Nuttie, not very relevantly as far as the words went.

'*Scheiden und weiden thut weh!*' quoted Mary.

'If his place was only Monks Horton. What will Aunt Ursel do?'

'I think perhaps she may be induced to join us,' said Mary. 'We mean to do our best to persuade her.'

'And there's the choir! And my class, and the harmonium,' went on Nuttie, while Gerard walked on disconsolately.

'Micklethwayte has existed without you, Nuttie,' said Mr. Spyers, taking her on with him alone. 'Perhaps it will be able to do so again. My dear, you had better look on. There will be plenty for you to learn and to do where you are going, and you will be sure to find much to enjoy, and also something to bear. I should like to remind you that the best means of going on well in this new world will be to keep self down and to have the strong desire that only love can give to be submissive, and to do what is right both to God and your father and mother. May I give you a text to take with you? "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right."'

They were at the door and there was no time for an answer, but Nuttie, as she took her place, was partly touched and partly fretted at the admonition.

The question as to her remaining a day or two after her mother was soon disposed of. Mrs. Egremont sent a pretty little note to make the request, but the elegant valet who appeared at ten o'clock brought a verbal message that his master wished Mrs. and Miss Egremont to be ready by two o'clock to join him in calling on Lady Kirkaldy at Monks Horton, and that if their luggage was ready by four o'clock, he (Gregorio) would take charge of it, as they were all to go up to town by the 4.40 train.

'Did he have my note?' faltered Alice, stimulated by the imploring glances of aunt and daughter, but anticipating the answer.

'Yes, madame, but he wishes that Miss Egremont should accompany you immediately.'

'Of course,' was Alice's comment, 'now that he has found his child, he cannot bear to part with her.'

And all through the farewells that almost rent the gentle Alice's heart in two, she was haunted by the terror that she or her daughter should have red eyes to vex her husband. As to Mr. Dutton, he had only come in with Gerard in a great hurry just after breakfast, said there was much to do to-day at the office, as they were going to take stock, and they should neither of them have time to come home to luncheon. He shook the hands of mother and daughter heartily, promised to 'look after' Miss Headworth, and

bore off in his train young Gerard, looking the picture of woe, and muttering 'I believe he has got it up on purpose;' while mother and daughter thought it very odd, and rather unkind.

CHAPTER IX.

NEW PLUMES.

'And ye sall walk in silk attire,
And siller hae to spare.'—*Old Ballad.*

THE very best open fly and pair of horses, being the equipage most like a private carriage possessed by the Royal Hotel, came to the door with Mr. Egremont seated in it, at a few minutes after two o'clock, and found Alice in her only black silk, with a rose in her bonnet, and a tie to match on her neck, hastily procured as signs of her wifehood.

She had swallowed her tears, and Nuttie was not a crying person, but was perfectly scarlet on her usually brown cheeks. Her father muttered some civility about back seats, but it was plain that it was only in words, and she never thought of anything but looking back, with her last wave to her aunt and the two maids, one crying at the gate, the other at the door.

'There,' said Mr. Egremont, as they drove away, 'that is over!'

'My dear aunt,' said his wife. 'Who can express her goodness to me?'

'*Celà va sans dire*,' was the reply. 'But these are connections that happily Ursula is young enough to forget and leave behind.'

'I shall never forget!' began Nuttie, but she saw her father composing himself in his corner without paying the slightest heed to what she was saying, and she encountered a warning and alarmed glance from her mother, so she was forced to content herself with uttering silent vows of perpetual recollection as she passed each well-known object,—the unfinished church, with Mr. Spyers at the door talking to old Bellman; the Town Hall, whose concerts, lectures, and S. P. G. meetings had been her chief gaiety and excitement; the School of Art, where Lady Kirkaldy's appearance now seemed to her to have been like that of a bird of omen; past the shops in the High Street, with a little exultation at the thought of past desires which they had excited. Long could she have rattled away, her hopes contradicting her regrets, and her regrets qualifying her anticipations, but she saw that her mother was nervous about every word and gesture, and fairly looked dismayed when she exclaimed, 'Oh, mother, there's Etta Smith; how surprised she will be!' bowing and smiling with all her might.

There was a look of bare toleration on Mr. Egremont's face, as if he endured because it would soon be over, as Nuttie bowed several times, and his wife, though less quick to catch people's eyes, sometimes also made her recognition. When the streets were past and Nuttie had aimed her last nods at the nursery parties out walking

on the road, she became aware that those cold, lack-lustre, and yet sharply critical eyes of her father were scanning her all over.

'She has been educated?' he presently said to his wife.

'Oh yes,' was the eager answer. 'She is in the highest form at the High School, and has to go up for the Senior Local Examination. Miss Belper makes sure that she will get a first class.'

Mr. Egremont gave a little wave of the hand, as dismissing something superfluous, and said, 'I hope she has some accomplishments.'

'She has done very fairly in French and German——'

'And Latin,' put in Ursula.

'And she has had several prizes at the School of Art.'

'And music? That's the only thing of any value in society,' he said impatiently, and Mrs. Egremont said more timidly, 'She has learnt music regularly.'

'But I don't care about it,' broke in Nuttie. 'I haven't mother's ear nor her voice. I learnt the science in case I should have to teach, and they make me practise. I don't mind classical music, but I can't stand rubbish, and I think it is waste of time.'

Mr. Egremont looked fairly amused, as at the outspoken folly of an *enfant terrible*, but he only said, either to his wife or to himself, 'A little polish, and then she may be fairly presentable.'

'We have taken great pains with her,' answered the gentle mother, evidently taking this as a great compliment, while the daughter was tingling with in-

dignation. She, bred up by mother, and aunt, and Mary Nugent, to be barely presentable. Was not their society at Micklethwayte equal in good manners to any, and superior, far superior, in goodness and intelligence to these stupid fashionable people, who undervalued all her real useful acquirements, and cared for nothing but trumpery music.

The carriage entered the park, and Nuttie saw lake and woods from a fresh point of view. The owners were both at home, and Nuttie found herself walking behind her parents into a cheerful apartment, half library, half morning-room. Mrs. Egremont was by far the most shy and shrinking of the party, but it was an occasion that showed her husband's complete tact and *savoir faire*. He knew perfectly well that the Kirkaldys knew all about it, and he therefore took the initiative. 'You are surprised to see us,' he said, as he gave his hand, 'but we could not leave the country without coming to thank Lady Kirkaldy for her kindness in assisting in following up the clue to Mrs. Egremont's residence.'

'I am very happy,' said Lady Kirkaldy, while all were being seated.

'I think it was here that my nephew Mark first met one whom, child as he was, he could not but remember.'

'I don't think you met him here,' said Lady Kirkaldy to Mrs. Egremont; 'but he heard the name and was struck by it.'

'Dear Mark!' was the response. 'He was so kind.'

'He is a dear good boy,' chimed in my lady.

'Yes,' said her lord, 'an excellent good fellow with plenty of brains.'

'As he well knows,' said Mr. Egremont. 'Oh yes; I quite agree with all you say of him! One ought to be thankful for the possession of a rare specimen.'

It was in the tone in which Falstaff discussed that sober boy, Lord John of Lancaster. Lord Kirkaldy asked if the visitors were going to remain long in the neighbourhood.

'We are due in London to-night,' replied Mr. Egremont. 'We shall spend a day or two there, and then go home. Alice,' he added, though his wife had never heard him call her so before, 'Lady Kirkaldy knows your inexperience. Perhaps she would be good enough to give you some addresses that might be useful.'

'I shall be delighted,' said the lady, cordially looking at the blushing Mrs. Egremont.

'Dressmaker, and all the rest of it,' said Mr. Egremont. 'You know better than she does what she will require, and a little advice will be invaluable. Above all, if you could tell her how to pick up a maid.'

Lady Kirkaldy proposed to take the mother and daughter up to her dressing-room, where she kept her book of addresses to London tradesmen; and Mr. Egremont only begged that they would remember the 4.40 train. Then Lord Kirkaldy was left to entertain him, while the ladies went up the broad staircase to the pleasant room, which had a mingled look of refine-

ment and usefulness which struck Nuttie at once. Lady Kirkaldy, as soon as the door was shut, took her visitor by the hand, kissed her forehead, and said, 'You must let me tell you how glad I am.'

The crystal veil at once spread over Alice's eyes.

'Oh, thank you, Lady Kirkaldy! I am *so* happy, and yet I am so afraid. Please tell me what we shall *do* so that we may not vex him, so high bred and fastidious as he is?'

'Be yourself! That's all, my dear,' said Lady Kirkaldy tenderly. 'Don't be afraid. You are quite incapable of doing anything that could distress the most fastidious taste.'

It was perfectly true of the mother, perhaps less so of the daughter; but Lady Kirkaldy only thought of her as a mere girl, who could easily be modelled by her surroundings. The kind hostess applied herself to giving the addresses of the people she thought likely to be most useful in the complete outfit which she saw would be necessary, explaining to which establishments she applied with confidence if she needed to complete her wardrobe in haste, feeling certain that nothing would be sent her that she disliked, and giving leave to use her name. She soon saw that the mother was a little dazed, while Ursula's eyes grew rounder at the unlimited vista of fine clothes, and she assented, and asked questions as to the details. As to a maid, Lady Kirkaldy would write to a person who would call on Mrs. Egremont at the hotel in London, and who might be what was wanted; and in conclusion, Lady Kirkaldy,

with some diffidence, begged to be written to—'if—if,' she said, 'there happened to be any difficulty about which you might not like to consult Mrs. William Egremont.' Nuttie hardly knew whether to be grateful or not, for she did not believe in any standard above that of Micklethwayte, and she was almost angry at her mother's grateful answer—'Oh, thank you! I should be so grateful! I am so afraid of annoying him by what he may think small, ignorant, country-town ways! You will understand——'

Lady Kirkaldy did understand, and she dreaded what might be before the sweet little yielding woman, not from want of breeding so much as from the long-indulged selfishness of her husband; but she encouraged her as much as possible, and promised all possible counsel, bringing her downstairs again just in time.

'Pretty little soul!' said Lord Kirkaldy, as the fly clattered away. 'I wonder whether Mark has done her a kindness!'

'It is just what she is, a pretty, nay, a beautiful soul, full of tenderness and forgiveness and affection and humility, only I doubt whether there is any force or resolution to hold her own. You smile! Well, perhaps the less of that she has the better she may get on with him. Did he say anything about her?'

'No; I think he wants to ignore that they have not spent the last twenty years together.'

'That may be the best way for all parties. Do you think he will behave well to her?'

'No man could well do otherwise to such a sweet

little thing,' said Lord Kirkaldy; 'especially as she will be his most obedient slave, and will make herself necessary to him. It is much better luck than he deserves; but I pity her when she comes to make her way with yon ladies!'

'I wish I was there! I know she will let herself be trodden on! However, there's Mark to stand up for her, and William Egremont will do whatever he thinks right and just. I wish I knew how his wife will take it!'

CHAPTER X.

BRIDGEFIELD EGREMONT.

'Let us see these handsome houses
Where the wealthy nobles dwell.'—TENNYSON.

'MOTHER, mother!' cried two young people, bursting open the door of the pretty dining-room of Bridgefield Rectory, where the grown-up part of the family were lingering over a late breakfast.

'Gently, gently, children,' said the dignified lady at the head of the table. 'Don't disturb papa.'

'But we really have something to say, mother!' said the elder girl, 'and Fräulein said you ought to know. Uncle Alwyn is come home, and Mrs. Egremont. And please, are we to call her Aunt Egremont, or Aunt Alwyn, or what?'

The desired sensation was produced. Canon Egremont put down his newspaper. The two elder sisters looked from one to the other in unmitigated astonishment. Mark briefly made answer to the final question, 'Aunt Alice,' and Mrs. Egremont said gravely, 'How did you hear this, Rosalind? You know I always forbid you to gossip.'

'We didn't gossip, mother. We went up to the gardens to get some mulberries for our half-holiday feast; and Ronaldson came out and told us we must ask leave first, for the ladies were come. The Squire came home at nine o'clock last night, and Mrs. Egremont and all, and only sent a telegram two hours before to have the rooms got ready.'

'Has Uncle Alwyn gone and got himself married?' exclaimed one of the young ladies, in utter amazement.

'Not just now, Blanche,' said her father. 'It is an old story now. Your uncle married this lady, who had been governess to May and Mark, many years ago, and from—circumstances in which she was not at all to blame, he lost sight of her while he was abroad with old General Egremont. Mark met her about a fortnight ago, and this has led to your uncle's going in quest of her, though he has certainly been more sudden in his proceedings than I expected.'

The mother here succeeded in sending Rosalind and Adela, with their wondering eyes, off the scene, and she would much have liked to send her two stepdaughters after them, but one-and-twenty and eighteen could not so readily be ordered off as twelve and ten; and Mark, who had been prohibited from uttering a word to his sisters, was eagerly examining Margaret whether she remembered their Edda; but she had been only three years old at the time of the adventures in the Isle of Wight, and remembered nothing distinctly but the aspect of one of the sailors in the yacht.

'Well,' said Mrs. Egremont, 'this has come very suddenly upon us. It would have been more for her own dignity if she had held out a little before coming so easily to terms, after the way in which she has been treated.'

'When you see her, mother, you will understand,' said Mark.

'Shall we have to be intimate with her?' asked May.

'I desire that she should be treated as a relation,' said the Canon decidedly. 'There is nothing against her character,' and, as his wife was about to interrupt, —'nothing but an indiscretion to which she was almost driven many years ago. She was cruelly treated, and I for one am heartily sorry for having let myself be guided by others.'

Mrs. William Egremont felt somewhat complacent, for she knew he meant Lady de Lyonnais, and there certainly had been no love lost between her and her step-children's grandmother; but she was a sensible woman, and forbore to speak, though there was a mental reservation that intimacy would a good deal depend upon circumstances. Blanche cried out that it was a perfect romance, and May gravely said, 'But is she a lady?'

'A perfect lady,' said Mark. 'Aunt Margaret says so.'

'One knows what a perfect lady means,' returned May.

'Come, May,' said Mrs. Egremont, 'do not let us

begin with a prejudice. By all accounts the poor thing has conducted herself with perfect respectability all this time. What did you tell me, Mark? She has been living with an aunt, keeping a school at Micklethwayte.'

'Not quite,' said Mark. 'She has been acting as a daily governess. She seemed to be on friendly terms with the clerical folk. I came across the name at a school feast, or something of the kind, which came off in the Kirkaldys' park.'

'Oh, then, I know exactly the sort of person!' returned May, pursing up her lips.

Mark laughed and said, 'I wonder whether it is too soon to go up and see them. I wonder what my uncle thinks of his daughter.'

'What! You don't mean to say there is a daughter?' cried May.

'Even so. And exactly like you too, Miss May.'

'Then you are cut out, Mark!'

'You are cut out, I think, May. You'll have to give her all your Miss Egremont cards.'

'No,' said the young lady; 'mother made me have my Christian name printed. She said all but the daughters of the head of the family ought to have it so. I'm glad of it.'

'How old is she?' asked Blanche.

'About a year younger than you.'

'I think it is very interesting,' said Blanche. 'How wonderful it must all be to her! I will go up with you, Mark, as soon as I can get ready.'

'You had better wait till later in the day, Blanche,'

said the mother. She knew the meeting was inevitable, but she preferred having it under her own eye, if she could not reconnoitre.

She was a just and sensible woman, who felt reparation due to the newly-discovered sister-in-law, and that harmony, or at least the appearance of it, must be preserved; but she was also exclusive and fastidious by nature, and did not look forward to the needful intercourse with much satisfaction either on her own account or that of her family.

She told Mark to say that she should come to see Mrs. Egremont after luncheon, since he was determined to go at once, and moreover to drag his father with him. Canon Egremont was a good and upright man, according to his lights, which were rather those of a well-beneficed clergyman of the first than of the last half of the century, intensified perhaps that the passive voice was the strongest in him. All the country knew that Canon Egremont could be relied on to give a prudent, scholarly judgment, and to be kind and liberal, when once induced to stir mind or body—but how to do that was the problem. He had not been a young man at the time of his first marriage, and was only a few years' junior to his brother, though he had the fresh, wholesome look of a man who kept regular hours and lived much in the air.

Alice knew him at once, and thought eighteen years had made little change, as, at Nuttie's call to her, she looked from the window and saw the handsome, dignified, gray-haired, close-shaven rosy face, and the

clerical garb unchanged in favour of long coats and high waistcoats.

The mother and daughter were exploring the house together. Mr. Egremont had made it known that he preferred having his breakfast alone, and not being disturbed in the forenoon. So the two ladies had breakfasted together at nine, the earliest hour at which they could prevail on the household to give them a meal. Indeed Nuttie had slept till nearly that time, for between excitement and noise, her London slumbers had been broken; and her endeavour to keep Micklethwayte hours had resulted in a long, weary, hungry time in the sitting-room of the hotel, with nothing to do, when the gaze from the window palled on her, but to write to her aunt and Mary Nugent. The rest of the day had been spent in driving about in a brougham with her mother shopping, and this she could not but enjoy exceedingly, more than did the timid Mrs. Egremont, who could not but feel herself weighted with responsibility; and never having had to spend at the utmost more than ten pounds at a time, felt bewildered at the cheques put into her hands, and then was alarmed to find them melting away faster than she expected.

There was a very late dinner, after which Mr. Egremont, on the first day, made his wife play *bézique* with him. She enjoyed it, as a tender reminiscence of the yachting days; but Nuttie found herself *de trop*, and was reduced to the book she had contrived to purchase on her travels. The second night Mr.

Egremont had picked up two friends, not yet gone out of town, whose talk was of horses and of yachts, quite incomprehensible to the ladies. They were very attentive to Mrs. Egremont, whom they evidently admired, one so visibly as to call up a blush; but they disregarded the daughter as a schoolgirl. Happily they appeared no more after the dinner; but Nuttie's first exclamation of astonished disgust was silenced at once by her mother with unusual determination, 'You must not speak so of your father's friends.'

'Not when——'

'Not at all,' interrupted Mrs. Egremont.

The only sense of promotion to greatness that Ursula had yet enjoyed was in these fine clothes, and the maid whom Lady Kirkaldy had recommended, a grave and severe-looking person, of whom both stood somewhat in awe. The arrival at Bridgefield had been too late for anything to be taken in but a general impression of space and dreariness, and the inevitable dinner of many courses, after which Nuttie was so tired out that her mother sent her to bed.

Since the waking she had made some acquaintance with the house. There was no show of domestics, no curtseying housekeeper to parade the new mistress over the house; Mr. Egremont had told his wife that she must fill up the establishment as she pleased, but that there was an admirable cook downstairs, and he would not have her interfered with—she suited his tastes as no one else did, and she must be left to deal with the provisions and her own underlings. There

was a stable establishment, and a footman had been hired in town, but there was besides only one untidy-looking housemaid, who began by giving warning; and Alice and Nuttie had roamed about without meeting any one from the big wainscotted dining-room with faded crimson curtains and family portraits, the older grimy, the younger chalky, to the two drawing-rooms, whose gilding and pale blue damask had been preserved by pinafores of brown holland; the library, which looked and smelt as if Mr. Egremont was in the habit of sitting there, and a big billiard-room, all opening into a shivery-feeling hall, with Scagliola columns and a few dirty statues between them; then upstairs to a possible morning-room, looking out over a garden lawn, where mowing was going on in haste, and suites of dreary shut-up fusty bed-rooms. Nuttie, who had notions of choosing her own bower, could not make up her mind which looked the least inviting. It did not seem as if girls could ever have laughed together, or children clattered up and down the stairs. Mrs. Egremont begged her to keep possession for the present at least of the chamber where the grim housemaid had chosen to put her, and which had the advantage of being aired.

The two windows looked out over the park, and thence it was that while Morris, the maid, was unpacking and putting away the new purchases, and Nuttie was standing, scarcely realising that such pretty hats and bonnets could be her very own, when her mother beheld the canon and Mark advancing up the

drive. It was with a great start that she called Ursula to come down directly with her, as no one would know where to find them, hastily washing the hands that had picked up a sense of dustiness during the exploration, and taking a comprehensive glance in the cheval glass, which showed her some one she felt entirely unfamiliar to her in a dainty summer costume of pale gray silk picked out with a mysterious shade of pink. Ursula too thought Miss Egremont's outer woman more like a Chelsea shepherdess than Nuttie's true self, as she tripped along in her buckled shoes and the sea green stockings that had been sent home with her skirt. With crimson cheeks and a throbbing heart, Alice was only just at the foot of the stairs when the newcomers had made their way in, and the kind Canon, ignoring all that was past, held out his hands saying, 'Well, my dear, I am glad to see you here,' kissing Mrs. Egremont on each cheek. 'And so this is your daughter. How do you do, my dear—Ursula? Isn't that your name?' And Ursula had again to submit to a kiss, much more savoury and kindly than her father's, though very stubbly. And oh! her uncle's dress was like that of no one she had ever seen except the rector of the old church, the object of unlimited contempt to the adherents of St. Ambrose's.

As to Mark, he only kissed his aunt, and shook hands with her, while his father ran on with an unusual loquacity that was a proof of nervousness in him.

'Mrs. Egremont—Jane, I mean—will be here after luncheon. She thought you would like to get settled in first. How is Alwyn? Is he down yet?'

'I will see,' in a trembling voice.

'Oh no, never mind, Alwyn hates to be disturbed till he has made himself up in the morning. My call is on *you*, you know. Where are you sitting?'

'I don't quite know. In the drawing-room, I suppose.'

The Canon, knowing the house much better than she did, opened a door into a third drawing-room she had not yet seen, a pretty little room, fitted up with fluted silk, like a tent, somewhat faded but not much the worse for that, and opening into a conservatory, which seemed to have little in it but some veteran orange trees. Nuttie, however, exclaimed with pleasure at the nicest room she had seen, and Mark began unfastening the glass door that led into it. Meantime Alice, with burning cheeks and liquid eyes, nerved her voice to say, 'Oh, sir—Mr. Egremont—please forgive me! I know now how wrong I was.'

'Nonsense, my dear. Bygones are bygones. You were far more sinned against than sinning, and have much to forgive me. There, my dear, we will say no more about it, nor think of it either. I am only too thankful that poor Alwyn should have some one to look after him.'

Alice, who had dreaded nothing more than the meeting with her former master, was infinitely relieved and grateful for this kindness. She had ejaculated,

'Oh, you are so good!' in the midst, and now at the mention of her husband, she exclaimed, 'Oh! do you think he is ill? I can't help being afraid he is, but he will not tell me, and does not like to be asked.'

'Poor fellow, he has damaged his health a good deal,' was the answer. 'He had a sharp attack in the spring, but he has pretty well got over it, and Raikes told me there was no reason for uneasiness, provided he would be careful; and that will be a much easier matter now. I should not wonder if we saw him with quite a renewed youth.'

So the Canon and Mrs. Egremont were getting on pretty well together, but there was much more stiffness and less cordiality between the two cousins, although Mark got the window open into the conservatory, and showed Nuttie the way into the garden, advising her to ask Ronaldson, the gardener, to fill the conservatory with flowers. The pavilion, as this little room was called, always seemed to have more capacities for being lived in than any other room in the house. It had been fitted up when such things were the fashion for the shortlived bride of 'our great uncle.'

'The colour must have been awful then,' said Mark, looking up at it, 'enough to set one's teeth on edge; but it has faded into something quite orthodox—much better than could be manufactured for you.'

Mark had evidently some ideas of art, and was besides inclined to do the honours to the stranger;

but Nuttie was not going to encourage him or anybody else to make up to her, while she had that look of Gerard Godfrey's in her mind's eye. So she made small answer, and he felt rebuffed, but supposed her shy, and wondered when he could go back to her mother, who was so much more attractive.

Presently his father went off to storm the den of the master of the house, and there was a pleasant quarter of an hour, during which the three went out through the conservatory, and Mark showed the ins-and-outs of the garden, found out Ronaldson, and congratulated him on having some one at last to appreciate his flowers, begging him to make the conservatory beautiful. And Mrs. Egremont's smile was so effective that the Scot forthwith took out his knife and presented her with the most precious of the roses within his reach.

Moreover Mark told the names and ages of all his sisters, whole and half. He was the only son, except a little fellow in the nursery. And he exhorted his aunt not to be afraid of his step-mother, who was a most excellent person, he declared, but who never liked to see any one afraid of her.

There was something a little alarming in this, but on the whole the visit was very pleasant and encouraging to Mrs. Egremont; and she began rejoicing over the kindness as soon as the Canon had summoned his son, and they had gone away together.

'I am sure you must be delighted with your uncle and cousin, my dear,' she said.

'He's not a bit my notion of a priest,' returned Nuttie. 'And I don't believe he has any daily prayers!'

'He is old-fashioned, my dear.'

'One of the stodgey old clergymen in books,' observed Nuttie. 'I didn't think there were any of that sort left.'

'Oh, my dear, pray don't take fancies into your head! He is a very, very good man, and has been most kind to me, far more than I deserve, and he is your uncle, Nuttie. I do so hope you will get on well with your cousins.'

Here a gong, a perfectly unknown sound to Nuttie, made itself heard, and rather astonished her by the concluding roar. The two ladies came out into the hall as Mr. Egremont was crossing it. He made an inclination of the head, and uttered a sort of good morning to his daughter, but she was perfectly content to have no closer salutation. Having a healthy noonday appetite, her chief wish was at the moment that those beautiful little cutlets, arranged in a crown form, were not so very tiny; or that, with two men-servants looking on, it were possible to attain to a second help, but she had already learnt that Gregorio would not hear her, and that any attempt to obtain more food frightened her mother.

'So his reverence has been to see you,' observed Mr. Egremont. 'William, if you like it better.'

'Oh yes, and he was kindness itself!'

'And how did Master Mark look at finding I could dispense with his assistance?'

'I think he is very glad.'

Mr. Egremont laughed. 'You are a simple woman, Edda! The pose of virtuous hero was to have been full compensation for all that it might cost him! And no doubt he looks for the reward of virtue likewise.'

Wherewith he looked full at Ursula, who, to her extreme vexation, felt herself blushing up to the ears. She fidgeted on her chair, and began a most untrue 'I'm sure——' for, indeed, the poor girl was sure of nothing, but that her father's manner was most uncomfortable to her. His laugh choked whatever she might have said, which perhaps was well, and her mother's cheeks glowed as much as hers did.

'Did the Canoness—Jane, I mean—come up?' Mr. Egremont went on.

'Mrs. Egremont? No; she sent word that she is coming after luncheon.'

'Hm! Then I shall ride out and leave you to her majesty. Now look you, Alice, you are to be very careful with William's wife. She is a Condamine, you know, and thinks no end of herself; and your position among the women-folk of the county depends more on how she takes you up than anything else. But that doesn't mean that you are to let her give herself airs and domineer over you. Remember you are the elder brother's wife—Mrs. Egremont of Bridgefield Egremont—and she is nothing but a parson's wife, and I won't have her meddling in my house. Only don't you be

absurd and offend her, for she can do more for or against you in society than any one else—more's the pity!'

'Oh! won't you stay and help me receive her?' exclaimed the poor lady, utterly confused by these contrary directions.

'Not I! I can't abide the woman! nor she me!' He added, after a moment, 'You will do better without me.'

So he went out for his ride, and Ursula asked, 'Oh, mother! what will you do?'

'The best I can, my dear. They are good people, and are sure to be kinder than I deserve.'

Nuttie was learning that her mother would never so much as hear, far less answer, a remark on her husband. It was beginning to make a sore in the young heart that a barrier was thus rising, where there once had been as perfect oneness and confidence as could exist between two natures so dissimilar, though hitherto the unlikeness had never made itself felt.

Mrs. Egremont turned the conversation to the establishing themselves in the pavilion, whither she proceeded to import some fancy-work that she had bought in London, and sent Nuttie to Ronaldson, who was arranging calceolarias, begonias, and geraniums in the conservatory, to beg for some cut-flowers for a great dusty-looking vase in the centre of the table.

These were being arranged when Mrs. William Egremont and Miss Blanche Egremont were ushered in, and there were the regular kindred embraces, after

which Alice and Nuttie were aware of a very handsome, dignified-looking lady, well though simply dressed in what was evidently her home costume, with a large shady hat and feather, her whole air curiously fitting the imposing nickname of the Canoness. Blanche was a slight, delicate-looking, rather pretty girl in a lawn-tennis dress. The visitor took the part of treating the newcomers as well-established relations.

'We would not inundate you all at once,' she said, 'but the children are all very eager to see their cousin. I wish you would come down to the Rectory with me. My ponies are at the door. I would drive you, and Ursula might walk with Blanche.' And, as Alice hesitated for a moment, considering how this might agree with the complicated instructions that she had received, she added, 'Never mind Alwyn. I saw him going off just before I came up, and he told William he was going to look at some horses at Hale's, so he is disposed of for a good many hours.'

Alice decided that her husband would probably wish her to comply, and she rejoiced to turn her daughter in among the cousins, so hats, gloves, and parasols were fetched, and the two mothers drove away with the two sleek little toy ponies. By which it may be perceived that Mrs. William Egremont's first impressions were favourable.

'It is the shortest way through the gardens,' said Blanche. 'Have you been through them yet?'

'Mark walked about with us a little.'

'You'll improve them ever so much. There are

great capabilities. Look, you could have four tennis courts on this one lawn. We wanted to have a garden-party up here last year, and father said we might, but mother thought Uncle Alwyn might think it a liberty; but now you'll have some delicious ones? Of course you play lawn-tennis?'

'I have seen it a very few times,' said Nuttie.

'Oh, we must teach you! Fancy living without lawn-tennis!' said Blanche. 'I always wonder what people did without it. Only'—with an effort at antiquarianism—'I believe they had croquet.'

'Aunt Ursula says there wern't garden-parties before croquet came in.'

'How dreadful, Ursula! Your name's Ursula, isn't it? Haven't you some jolly little name to go by?'

'Nuttie.'

'Nuttie! That's scrumptious! I'll call you Nuttie, and you may call me Pussycat.'

'That's not so nice as Blanche.'

'Mother won't have me called so when strangers are there, but you aren't a stranger, you know. You must tell me all about yourself, and how you came never to learn tennis!'

'I had something else to do,' said Nuttie, with dignity.

'Oh, you were in the schoolroom! I forgot. Poor little Nuts!'

'At school,' said Ursula.

'Ah, I remember! But you're out now, aren't you? I've been out since this spring. Mother won't

let us come out till we are eighteen, isn't it horrid? And we were *so* worked there! I can tell you a finishing governess is an awful institution! Poor little Rosie and Adey will be in for one by and by. At present they've only got a jolly little Fräulein that they can do anything they please with.'

'Oh, I wonder if she would tell me of some German books!'

'You don't mean that you want to read German!' and Blanche stood still, and looked at her cousin in astonishment.

'Why, what else is the use of learning it?'

'Oh, I don't know. Every one does. If one went abroad or to court, you know,' said Blanche vaguely; but Ursula had now a fresh subject of interest; for, on emerging from the shrubbery, they came in sight of a picturesque but not very architectural church, which had the smallest proportion of wall and the largest of roof, and a pretty oriel-windowed schoolhouse covered with clematis. Nuttie rushed into inquiries about services and schools, and was aghast at hearing of mere Sundays and saints' days.

'Oh no! father isn't a bit Ritualistic. I wish he was, it would be so much prettier; and then he always advertises for curates of moderate views, and they are so stupid. You never saw such a stick as we have got now, Mr. Edwards; and his wife isn't a lady, I'm sure.'

Then as to schools, it was an absolute amazement to Nuttie to find that the same plans were in force as had prevailed when her uncle had come to the living

and built that pretty house—nay, were kept up at his sole expense, because he liked old-fashioned simplicity, and did not choose to be worried with Government inspection.

'And,' said Blanche, 'every one says our girls work ever so much better, and make nicer servants than those that are crammed with all sorts of nonsense not fit for them.'

As to the Sunday school. 'Mother and the curate take care of that. I'm sure, if you like it, you can have my class, for I always have a headache there, and very often I can't go. Only May pegs away at it, and she won't let me have the boys, who are the only jolly ones, because she says I spoil them. But you must be *my* friend—mind, Nuttie, not May's, for we are nearer the same age. When is your birthday? You must put it down in my book!'

Nuttie, who had tolerable experience of making acquaintance with new girls, was divided between a sense of Blanche's emptiness, and the warmth excited by her friendliness, as well as of astonishment at all she heard and saw.

Crossing the straggling, meandering village street, the cousins entered the grounds of the Rectory, an irregular but well-kept building of the soft stone of the country, all the garden front of it a deep verandah that was kept open in summer, but closed with glass frames in the winter—flower-beds lying before it, and beyond a lawn where the young folk were playing at the inevitable lawn-tennis.

Margaret was not so pretty as Blanche, but had a more sensible face, and her welcome to Ursula was civil but reserved. Rosalind and Adela were bright little things, in quite a different style from their half-sisters, much lighter in complexion and promising to be handsomer women. They looked full of eagerness and curiosity at the new cousin, whom Blanche set down on a bank, and proceeded to instruct in the mysteries of the all-important game by comments and criticisms on the players.

As soon as Mark and Adela had come out conquerors, Ursula was called on to take her first lesson. May resigned her racket, saying she had something to do, and walked off the field, and carrying off with her Adela, who, as Blanche said, 'had a spine,' and was ordered to lie down for an hour every afternoon. The cheerfulness with which she went spoke well for the training of the family.

Nuttie was light-footed and dexterous handed, and accustomed to active amusements, so that, under the tuition of her cousins, she became a promising pupil, and thawed rapidly, even towards Mark.

She was in the midst of her game when the two mothers came out, for the drive had been extended all round the park, under pretext of showing it to its new mistress, but really to give the Canoness an opportunity of judging of her in a *tête-à-tête*. Yet that sensible woman had asked no alarming questions on the past, still less had offered any advice that could seem like interference. She had only named localities,

mentioned neighbours, and made little communications about the ways of the place such as might elicit remarks; and, as Alice's voice betrayed less and less constraint, she ventured on speaking of their daughters, so as to draw forth some account of how Ursula might have been educated.

And of this, Alice was ready and eager to talk, telling how clever and how industrious Nuttie had always been, and how great an advantage Miss Nugent's kindness was, and how she was hoping to go up for the Cambridge examination; then, detecting some doubt in her companion's manner, she said, 'It would be a great disappointment to her not to do so now. Do you think she had better not?'

'I don't think she will find time to go on with the preparation! And, to tell the truth, I don't think we are quite ripe for such things in this county. We are rather backward, and Ursula, coming in fresh upon us, might find it a disadvantage to be thought much cleverer than other people.'

'Ah! I was not quite sure whether her father would like it.'

'I do not think he would. I am sure that if my little Rose were to take it into her head, I should have hard work to get her father's consent, though no doubt the world will have progressed by the time she is old enough.'

'That settles it,' said Alice. 'Thank you, Mrs. Egremont. I own,' she added presently, 'that I do somewhat regret that it cannot be, for I thought that

a motive for keeping up her studies would be helpful to my child;—I do not mean for the sake of the studies, but of the—the balance in all this change and novelty.'

'You are quite right, I have felt it myself,' said her sister-in-law. 'Perhaps something could be done by essay societies. May belongs to one, and if Ursula is an intellectual girl, perhaps you could keep her up to some regular employment in the morning. I succeeded in doing so when May came out, but I can accomplish nothing regular but music with Blanche; and an hour's steady practice a day is better than nothing.'

The drive was on the whole a success, and so was the tea-drinking in the verandah, where Aunt Alice and little five-years old Basil became fast friends and mutual admirers; the Canon strolled out and was installed in the big, cushioned basket-chair that crackled under his weight; Blanche recounted Nuttie's successes, and her own tennis engagements for the week; Mark lay on a rug and teased her, and her *dachshund;* Nuttie listened to the family chatter as if it were a play, and May dispensed the cups, and looked grave and severe.

'Well?' said the Canon anxiously, when Mark, Blanche, and little Basil had insisted on escorting the guests home, and he and his wife were for a few minutes *tête-à-tête.*

'It might have been much worse,' said the lady. 'She is a good little innocent thing, and has more

good sense than I expected. Governessy, that's all, but she will shake out of that.'

'Of course she will. It's the best thing imaginable for Alwyn!'

His wife kept back the words, 'A hundred times too good for Alwyn!'

CHAPTER XI.

LAWN-TENNIS.

'Madam, the guests are come, supper served up,
My young lady asked for!'—*Romeo and Juliet.*

A GARDEN-PARTY, Mrs. William Egremont decided, would be the best mode of testifying her approbation of her sister-in-law, and introducing the newcomers to the neighbourhood. So the invitations were sent forth for an early day of the coming week.

From how many points of view was Mrs. William Egremont's garden-party regarded, and how different! There was Basil, to whom it meant wearing his velvet suit and eating as many ices as mother would allow. To Blanche, it was an occasion for triumph on the tennis ground for herself, and for hopes for her pupil; and Ursula herself looked forward to it and practised for it like a knight for his first encounter in the lists, her sole care being to distinguish herself with her racket. To her mother, it was an ordeal, where she trusted not to be a mortification to her husband and his family; while to the hostess, it was a not unwelcome occasion

of exercising honest diplomacy and tact, not without a sense of magnanimity. To May, it was a bore to be endured with dutiful philosophy; to her good-natured father an occasion for hospitality, where he trusted that his brother would appear, and appear to advantage, and was ready even to bribe him thereto with that wonderful claret that Alwyn had always envied, and declared to be wasted on a parson. And Mark, perhaps he viewed the occasion with different eyes from any one else. At any rate, even the denizens of Bridgefield mustered there with as many minds as Scott ascribes to the combatants of Bannockburn, and there were probably as many other circles of feeling more or less intersecting one another among the more distant guests, most of them, however, with the same feeling of curiosity as to what this newly-discovered wife and daughter of Alwyn Egremont might be like.

Externally, in her rich black silk, trimmed with point lace, and her little straw-coloured bonnet with its tuft of feathery grass and blue cornflower, she was so charming that her daughter danced round her, crying, 'O mammy, mammy, if they could but see you at home!'—then, at a look: 'Well then—Aunt Ursel, and Miss Mary, and Mr. Dutton!'

Nuttie was very much pleased with her own pretty tennis dress; but she had no personal vanity for herself, only for her mother. The knowledge that she was no beauty was no grievance to her youthful spirits; but when her father surveyed them in the hall, she

looked for his verdict for her mother as if their relations were reversed.

'Ha! Well, you certainly are a pretty creature, Edda,' he said graciously. 'You'll pass muster! You want nothing but style. And, hang it! you'll do just as well without it, if the Canoness will only do you justice. Faces like that weren't given for nothing.'

She blushed incarnadine and accepted one of his kisses with a pleasure, at which Nuttie wondered, her motherly affection prompting her to murmur in his ear—

'And Ursula?'

'She'll not cut you out; but she is Egremont enough to do very fairly. Going already?'

'If you would come with us,' she said wistfully, to the horror of Nuttie, who was burning to be at the beginning of all the matches.

'I? oh no! I promised old Will to look in, but that won't be till late in the day, or I shall have to go handing all the dowagers into the dining-room to tea.'

'Then I think we had better go on. They asked us to come early, so as to see people arrive and know who they are.'

They was a useful pronoun to Alice, who felt it a liberty to call her grand-looking sister-in-law, Jane—was too well-bred to term her Mrs. William.

The mother and daughter crossed the gardens, Nuttie chattering all the way about the tennis tactics she had picked up from Blanche, while her mother answered her somewhat mechanically, wondering, as her

eye fell on the square squat gray church tower, what had become of the earnest devotion to church work and intellectual pursuits that used to characterise the girl. True, always both mother and daughter had hitherto kept up their church-going, and even their Sunday-school habits, nor had any hindrance come in their way, Mr. Egremont apparently acquiescing in what he never shared. But these things seemed, in Ursula's mind, to have sunk out of the proportion they held at Bridgefield, no longer to be the spirit of a life, but mere Sunday duties and occupations.

Was this wicked world getting a hold of the poor child? Which was duty? which was the world? This was the thought that perplexed Alice, too simple as yet to perceive that Ursula's former absorption had been in the interests that surrounded her and her companions, exactly as they were at present, and that the real being had yet to work itself out.

For herself, Alice did not think at all. She was rejoicing in her restored husband, and his evident affection. Her duty towards him was in her eyes plain. She saw, of course, that he had no religion, but she accepted the fact like that of bad weather; she loved him, and she loved her daughter; she said her prayers with all her heart for them, she hoped, and she did her best, without trying to go below the surface.

There was the Rectory gate wide open. There was Basil rushing up to greet his dear Aunt Alice, there were all the windows and doors of the Rectory open, and the nearer slopes covered with chairs and

seats of all dimensions, some under trees, some umbrelliferous, and glowing Afghan rugs, or spotted skins spread for those who preferred the ground. There was Blanche flitting about wild with excitement, and pouncing on Nuttie to admire her outfit, and reiterate instructions; there were the two younger girls altering the position of chairs according to their mother's directions; there were actually two guests—not very alarming ones, only the curate and his wife, both rather gaunt, bony people. He was button-holing the Canon, and she was trying to do the same by the Canoness about some parish casualty. The Canon hoped to escape in the welcome to his sister-in-law and niece, but he was immediately secured again, while his wife found it requisite to hurry off elsewhere, leaving Mrs. Edwards to tell her story to Mrs. Egremont. In point of fact, Alice really liked the good lady, was quite at ease with her, and felt parish concerns a natural element, so that she gave full heed and attention to the cruelty of Mrs. Parkins' depriving Betsy Butter (with an old father and mother to support) of her family washing, on the ground of a missing pocket handkerchief, the which Mrs. Edwards believed to have been abstracted by the favourite pickle of Miss Blanche's class, if only a confession could be elicited from him when undefended by his furious mother. Mrs. Egremont was listening with actual interest and sympathy to the history of Betsy Butter's struggles, and was inquiring the way to her cottage, when she was called off to be introduced to

the arrivals who were beginning to flood the lawn. She presently saw May, who had just come down, walking up and down with Mrs. Edwards, evidently hearing the story of the handkerchief. She thought it had been Nuttie for a moment. There was a general resemblance between the cousins that made them be mistaken for one another several times in the course of the day, since their dresses, though not alike, were of the same make and style.

Thus it was that as Nuttie was sitting on the grass in earnest contemplation of Blanche's play, a hand was familiarly laid on her shoulder, and a voice said, 'I haven't seen that horrid girl yet!'

After so many introductions, Nuttie had little idea whom she knew, or whom she did not know. She looked up and saw a small person in light blue, with the delicate features, transparent skin, and blue eyes that accompany yellow hair, with an indescribable glitter of mirth and joyousness about the whole creature, as if she were part and parcel of the sunbeam in which she stood.

'What horrid girl?' said Nuttie.

'The interloper, the newly-discovered savage, come to upset—Ah!'—with a little shriek—'It is'nt May! I beg your pardon.'

'I'm May's cousin,' said Nuttie, 'Ursula Egremont.'

'Oh, oh!' and therewith the fact burst on both girls at once. They stood still a moment in dismay, then the stranger went into a fit of laughter. 'Oh, I beg your pardon! I can't help it! It is so funny!'

Nuttie was almost infected, though somewhat hurt. 'Who said I was horrid?' she asked.

'Nobody! Nobody but me—Annaple Ruthven—and they'll all tell you, May and all, that I'm always putting my foot in it. And I never meant that you were horrid—you yourself—you know—only——'

'Only nobody wanted us here,' said Nuttie; 'but we could not help it.'

'Of course not. It was shocking, just my way. Please forgive me!' and she looked most pleading. Nuttie held out her hand with something about 'No one could mind;' and therewith Annaple cried, 'Oh, if you don't mind, we can have our laugh out!' and the rippling laughter did set Nuttie off at once. The peal was not over when May herself was upon them demanding what was the joke.

'Oh, there she is! The real May! Why,' said Annaple, kissing her, 'only think here I've been and gone and thought this was you, and inquired about—What was it?—the awful monster—the chimera dire—that Mark had routed up——'

'No; you didn't say that,' said Nuttie, half provoked.

'Never mind what I said. Don't repeat it. I only wish myself and every one else to forget it. Now it is swept to the winds by a good wholesome giggling. But what business have you two to be so inconveniently alike? You are as bad as the twin Leslies!'

'There's an old foremother on the staircase in white satin who left her looks to us both,' said May.

'You'll have to wear badges,' said Annaple. 'You know the Leslies were so troublesome that one had to be shipped off to the East Indies and the other to the West.'

'They married, that's all,' said May, seeing Nuttie looking mystified; and at that moment, Blanche's side coming out victorious, Nuttie descended into the arena to congratulate and be asked to form part of the next set.

'Well, that *was* a scrape!' said Annaple; 'but she wasn't bad about it! I must do something to make up for it somehow—get Janet to invite her, but really Janet is in such a state of mind that I am mildness itself compared with her. She would not have come, only John was curious, and declared he should go whether we did or not.'

'Ah!' said May, 'I saw him, like the rest of mankind, at madame's feet.'

'Oh! is she of that sort?'

'No,' said May, 'not at all. Mother and father too both think she is good to the backbone; but she is very pretty, with just the inane soft sweetness that men rave about—innocent really. All accounts of her are excellent, and she has nice parish ways, and will be as helpful as Uncle Alwyn will let her.'

'But she couldn't always have been nice?'

'Well, I verily believe it was all Uncle Alwyn's and grandmamma's fault. I know Mark thinks so.'

'When the women of a family acquit a woman it goes for something,' said Annaple. 'That's not original,

my dear, I heard old Lady Grosmede say so to Janet when she was deliberating over the invitation, "For a good deal more than Mr. Mark's, at any rate."'

'Mark is very fond of her—the mother, I mean. He says when he was a little fellow her loss was worse to him than even our mother's.'

'Do you remember the catastrophe?'

'Not a bit. Only when she is petting Basil it strikes me that I have heard the tones before. I only remember the time of misery under the crosspatches grandmamma got for us.'

'Well, it was a splendid cutting of his own throat in Mark,' said Annaple, 'so it ought to turn out well.'

'I don't know how it is to turn out for Mark,' answered May. 'Oh, here he comes!'

'Will you come into this set, Annaple?' he asked. 'They want another couple,' and, as she accepted, 'How do you get on with May's double?'

'I pity May for having such a double.'

'Don't encourage her by misplaced pity.'

'It's abominable altogether! I want to fly at somebody!'

'Exhaust your feelings on your racket, and reflect that you see a man released from bondage.'

'Is that philosophy or high-faluting?' she said in a teasing tone as the game began.

The Ruthvens had very blue blood in their veins, but as there were nine of the present generation, they possessed little beyond their long pedigree; even the head of the family, Lord Ronnisglen, being forced to

live as a soldier, leaving his castle to grouse shooters. His seven brothers had fared mostly in distant lands as they could, and his mother had found a home, together with her youngest child, at Lescombe, where her eldest was the wife of Sir John Delmar. Lady Ronnisglen was an invalid, confined to the house, and Lady Delmar had daughters fast treading on the heels of Annabella, so christened, but always called Annaple after the old Scottish queens, her ancestors. She had been May Egremont's chief friend ever since her importation at twelve years old, and the intimacy had been promoted by her mother and sister. Indeed, the neighbourhood had looked on with some amusement at the competition ascribed to Lady Delmar and to the wealthy parvenu, Mrs. West, for the heir-presumptive of Bridgefield Egremont.

Annaple's lightness and dexterity rendered her the best of the lady tennis-players, and the less practised Ursula found herself defeated in the match, in spite of a partner whose play was superior to Mark's, and with whom she shyly walked off to eat ices.

'I see,' said Annaple, 'it is a country-town edition of May. I shan't blunder between them again.'

'She will polish,' said Mark, 'but she is not equal to her mother.'

'Whom I have not seen yet. Ah, there's Mr. Egremont! Why, he looks quite renovated!'

'Well he may be!'

'But Mark, not to hurt your feelings, he must have behaved atrociously.'

'I'm not going to deny it,' said Mark.

'I always did think he looked like it,' said Annaple.

'When have you seen him before?'

'Only once, but it was my admirable sagacity, you understand? I always see all the villains in books just on his model. Oh, but who's that? How very pretty! You don't mean it is *she!* Well, she might be the heroine of anything!'

'Isn't she lovely?'

'And has she been keeping school like Patience on a monument all these years? It doesn't seem to have much damaged her damask cheek!'

'It was only daily governessing. She looks much better than when I first saw her; and as to the damask —why, that's deepened by the introduction to old Lady Grosmede that is impending.'

'She is being walked up to the old Spanish duck with the red rag round her leg to receive her fiat. What a thing it is to be a bearded Dowager, and rule one's neighbourhood!'

'I think she approves. She has made room for her by her side. Is she going to catechise her?'

Annaple made an absurd sound of mingled pity and disgust.

'Not that she—my aunt, I mean—need be afraid. The shame is all on the other side.'

'And I think Lady Grosmede has too much sense to think the worse of her for having worked for herself,' added Annaple. 'If it was not for mother I should long to begin!'

'You? It's a longing well known to me!—but you!'

'Exactly! As the Irishman felt blue moulded for want of a bating, so do I feel fagged out for want of an honest day's work.'

'If one only knew what to turn to,' said Mark so wearily that Annaple exclaimed,

'We seem to be in the frozen-out state of mind, and might walk up and down singing "I've got no work to do,"'—to which she gave the well known intonation.

'Too true,' said he, joining in the hum.

'But I thought you were by way of reading law.'

'One must see more than only "by way of" in these days to do any good.'

At that moment Basil ran up with a message that Lady Delmar was ready to go home.

They walked slowly up the terrace and Mark paused as they came near Mrs. Egremont to say, 'Aunt Alice, here is Miss Ruthven, May's great friend.'

Annaple met a pleasant smile, and they shook hands, exchanging an observation or two, while a little way off Lady Grosmede was nodding her strong old face at Lady Delmar, and saying, 'Tell your mother I'll soon come and see her, my dear. That's a nice little innocent body, lady-like, and thoroughly presentable. Alwyn Egremont might have done worse.'

'The only wonder is he did not!' returned Lady Delmar. 'They make the best of it here.'

'Very good taste of them. But, now I've seen *her*, I don't believe there's anything behind. Very hard

upon the poor young man, though it was all his doing, his mother says. I congratulate you that it had not gone any farther in that quarter.'

'Oh, dear no! Never dreamt of it. She is May's friend, that's all.'

Nevertheless Lady Delmar made a second descent in person to hurry Annaple away.

'Isn't it disgusting?' said May, catching her stepmother's smile.

'You will see a good deal more of the same kind,' said the Canoness; 'I am afraid more mortification is in store for Mark than he guesses. I wish that girl were more like her mother.'

'Mamma! a girl brought up among umbrella-makers! Just fancy! Why, she has just nothing in her!'

'Don't set Mark against her, May; he might do worse.'

'Her head is a mere tennis ball,' said May, drawing her own higher than ever, 'and no one would know her from a shop girl.'

'She is young enough,' said the Canoness. 'Don't class me with Lady Delmar, May—I only say—if—and that I don't think you realise the change Mark will feel.'

'Better so than sell himself,' muttered May.

CHAPTER XII.

OUT OF WORK.

'I'm seeking the fruit that's nae growing.'—*Ballad.*

Society recognised the newcomers. Lady Grosmede's card appeared the next day, and was followed by showers of others, and everybody asked everybody 'Have you seen Mrs. Egremont?'

It was well for Alice's happiness even at home that she was a success. When Alwyn Egremont had been lashed by his nephew's indignant integrity into tardy recognition of the wife of his youth, it had been as if he had been forced to pick up a flower which he had thrown away. He had considerable doubts whether it would answer. First, he reconnoitred, intending, if he found a homely or faded being, to pension her off; but this had been prevented by her undeniable beauty and grace, bringing up a rush of such tender associations as he was capable of. Yet even then, her position depended on the impression she might make on those about him, on her own power of self-assertion, and on her contributing to his comfort or pleasure.

Of self-assertion Alice had none, only a gentle dignity in her simplicity, and she was so absolutely devoted to him that he found his house far more pleasant and agreeable for her presence and unfailing attention, though still his estimation of her was influenced more than he owned to himself by that of the world in general, and the Rectory in particular.

And the Rectory did its part well. The Canon was not only charmed with the gentle lady, but felt an atonement due to her; and his wife, without ever breathing into any ears, save his, the mysterious adjective 'governessy,' praised her right and left, confiding to all inquirers the romance of the burnt yacht, the lost bride, and the happy meeting under Lady Kirkaldy's auspices, with the perfect respectability of the intermediate career, while such was the universal esteem for, and trust in herself and the Canon, that she was fully believed; and people only whispered that probably Alwyn Egremont had been excused for the desertion more than he deserved.

The subject of all this gossip troubled herself about it infinitely less than did the good Canoness. In effect she did not know enough of the world to think about it at all. Her cares were of a different order, chiefly caused by tenderness of conscience, and solicitude to keep the peace between the two beings whom she best loved.

Two things were in her favour in this latter respect, one that they saw very little of each other, since Mr. Egremont seldom emerged from his own rooms till after luncheon; and the other that Ursula's brains ran

to little but lawn-tennis for the ensuing weeks. To hold a champion's place at the tournaments, neck and neck with her cousin Blanche, and defeat Miss Ruthven, and that veteran player, Miss Basset, was her foremost ambition, and the two cousins would have practised morning, noon, and night if their mothers would have let them. There need have been no fear of Ursula's rebellion about the Cambridge honours, she never seemed even to think of them, and would have had no time in the more important competition of rackets. Indeed, it was almost treated as a hardship that the pair were forbidden to rush together before twelve o'clock, and that Ursula's mother insisted on rational home occupation until that time, setting the example herself by letter-writing, needlework, and sharing in the music which was a penance to the girl, only enforced by that strong sense of protecting affection which forbade rebellion. But Alice could hope that their performances were pleasant to her husband in the evening, if only to sleep by, and so she persisted in preparing for them.

Nuttie's rage for tennis, and apparent forgetfulness of her old life and aspirations, might be disappointing, but it conduced to make her mother's task easier than if she had been her original, critical, and protesting self. In the new and brilliant surroundings she troubled herself much less than could have been expected at the failure of her father, his house, nay, and of the parish itself, in coming up to the St. Ambrose standard. How much was owing to mere

novelty and intoxication, how much to a yet unanalysed disappointment, how much to May's having thrown her upon the more frivolous Blanche, could not be guessed. The effect was unsatisfactory to her mother, but a certain relief, for Nuttie's aid would have been only mischievous in the household difficulties that weighed on the anxious conscience. Good servants would not stay at Bridgefield Hall for unexplained causes, which their mistress believed to be connected with Gregorio, or with the treasure of a cook-housekeeper over whom she was forbidden to exercise any authority, and who therefore entirely neglected all meals which the master did not share with the ladies. Fortunately, Mr. Egremont came in one day at their luncheon and found nothing there but semi-raw beef, upon which there was an explosion; and being by this time convinced that his wife both would and could minister to his comfort, her dominion was established in the female department, though, as long as Gregorio continued paramount with his master, and the stables remained in their former state, it was impossible to bring matters up to the decorous standard of the Rectory, and if ever his mistress gave an order he did not approve, Gregorio overruled it as her ignorance. In fact, he treated both the ladies with a contemptuous sort of civility. Meantime Mr. Egremont was generally caressing and admiring in his ways towards his wife, with only occasional bursts of temper when anything annoyed him. He was proud of her, gave her a liberal allowance, and only refused to be troubled; and she was really happy in his affection,

for which she felt a gratitude only too humble in the eyes of her daughter.

They had parties. Blanche's ambition of tennis courts all over the lawn was fulfilled, and sundry dinners, which were crosses to Alice, who had neither faculty nor training for a leader and hostess, suffered much from the menu, more from the pairing of her guests, more again in catching her chief lady's eye after, and most of all from her husband's scowls and subsequent growls and their consequence, for Ursula broke out, 'It is not fair to blame my mother. How should she have all the *savoir-faire*, or what you may call it, of Aunt Jane, when she has had no practice?'

'Perhaps, Mrs. Egremont,' he retorted with extreme suavity, 'you will also attend to your daughter's manners.' Otherwise he took little notice of Ursula, viewing her perhaps, as did the neighbourhood, as a poor imitation of May, without her style, or it may be with a sense that her tongue might become inconvenient if not repressed. When he began to collect sporting guests of his own calibre in the shooting season, the Canoness quietly advised her sister-in-law to regard them as gentlemen's parties, and send Ursula down to spend the evening with her cousins; and to this no objection was made. Mr. Egremont wanted his beautiful wife at the head of his table, and his guests never comported themselves unsuitably before her; but nobody wanted the unformed girl, and she and Blanche were always happy together.

The chief restraint was when Mark was at home, and that was not always. He made sundry visits and expeditions, and was altogether in an uncomfortable condition of reaction and perplexity as to his future. He was a good and conscientious fellow, and had never been actually idle, but had taken education and life with the easiness of the prospective heir to a large property; and though he had acquitted himself creditably, it was with no view of making his powers marketable. Though he had been entered at the Temple, it was chiefly in order to occupy himself respectably, and to have a nominal profession, so as not to be wholly dependent on his uncle; and all that he had acquired was the conviction that it would be half a lifetime, if not a whole one, before the law would afford him a maintenance.

His father wished him to take Holy Orders with a view to the reversion of the Rectory, but Mark's estimate of clerical duty and vocation was just such as to make him shrink from them. He was three-and-twenty, an awkward age for all those examinations that stand as lions in the face of youth intended for almost any sort of service, and seldom or never to be gagged by interest. For one indeed, he went up and failed, and in such a manner as to convince him that cramming had more to do than general culture with success.

He had a certain consciousness that most people thought another way open to him, most decidedly his gentle aunt, and perhaps even his parents. The matter

came prominently before him one day at luncheon, when, some parochial affairs being on hand and Mr. Egremont out for the day, Alice, whose free forenoons enabled her to take a share in church and parish affairs, was there, as well as the curate and his wife.

These good people were in great commotion about a wedding about to take place between a young farmer and his delicate first cousin, the only survivor of a consumptive family.

'"Proputty, proputty,"' quoted the Canon. 'James Johnson is what they call a warm man.'

'It is a sin and a shame,' said Mrs. Edwards. 'What can they expect? George Johnson looks strong enough now, but they tell me his brother undoubtedly died of decline, though they called it inflammation; but there was tubercular disease.'

'I am afraid it is strong in the family,' said the Canoness, 'they all have those clear complexions; but I do believe George is heartily in love with poor little Emily.'

'First cousins ought to be in the table of degrees,' said Mr. Edwards.

'It is always a question whether the multiplying of prohibitions without absolute necessity is expedient,' said the Canon.

He spoke quite dispassionately, but the excellent couple were not remarkable for tact. Mrs. Edwards gave her husband such a glance of warning and consternation as violently inclined May to laugh, and he obediently and hesitatingly began, 'Oh yes, sir, I beg

your pardon. Of course there may be instances,' thereby bringing an intense glow of carnation into Alice's cheeks, while the Canon, ready for the occasion, replied, 'And George Johnson considers himself one of them. He will repair the old moat house, I suppose.'

And his wife, though she would rather have beaten Mrs. Edwards, demanded how many blankets would be wanted that winter.

The effect of this little episode was that Mark announced to his father that evening his strong desire to emigrate, an intention which the Canon combated with all his might. He was apparently a hale and hearty man, but he had had one or two attacks of illness that made him doubt whether he would be long-lived; and not only could he not bear to have his eldest son out of reach, but he dreaded leaving his family to such a head as his brother. Mark scarcely thought the reasons valid, considering the rapidity of communication with Canada, but it was not possible to withstand the entreaties of a father with tears in his eyes; and though he could not bring himself to consent to preparing to be his father's curate, he promised to do nothing that would remove him to another quarter of the world, and in two or three days more, started for Monks Horton to see what advice his uncle and aunt there could give him; indeed, Lord Kirkaldy's influence was reckoned on by his family almost as a sure card in the diplomatic line.

The Kirkaldys were very fond of Mark, and had an odd feeling of being accountable for the discovery

which had changed his prospects. They would have done anything for him that they could, but all Lord Kirkaldy's interest was at the foreign office, or with his fellow-diplomates, and here he soon found an insuperable bar. Mark's education had stood still from the time of Miss Headworth's flight till his father's second marriage, his energies having been solely devoted to struggles with the grim varieties of governess purveyed by his grandmother, and he had thus missed all chance of foundation of foreign languages, and when once at school, he had shared in the average English boy's contempt and aversion for the French masters who outscreamed a whole class.

In consequence, Lord Kirkaldy, an accurate and elegant scholar in European tongues, besides speaking them with the cosmopolitan ease of an ambassador's son, was horrified, not only at Mark's pronunciation, but at his attempts at letter-writing and translation, made with all the good will in the world, but fit for nothing but to furnish the good stories which the kind uncle refrained from telling any one but his wife. Unluckily, too, a Piedmontese family, some of them not strong in their English, were on a visit at Monks Horton, and the dialect in which the old marquis and Mark tried at times to interchange ideas about pheasants was something fearful. And as in the course of a week Mark showed no signs of improvement in vernacular French or Italian, Lord Kirkaldy's conscience would let him give no other advice than that his nephew should stick to English law living still on the

allowance his father gave him, and hoping for one of the chance appointments open to an English barrister of good family and fair ability.

Of course Mark had gone at once to carry tidings of 'Aunt Alice,' as he scrupulously called her, to old Miss Headworth, whom his aunt had continued to visit at intervals. That good lady had given up her boarders, having realised enough to provide for her own old age, and she had joined forces with the Nugents, Mary being very thankful to have her companionship for Mrs. Nugent, who was growing too blind and feeble to be satisfactorily left alone all day.

Mark delighted the old ladies by his visits and accounts of their darling's success and popularity, which he could paint so brightly that they could not help exulting, even though there might be secret misgivings as to the endurance of these palmy days. He was a great hero in their eyes, and they had too good taste to oppress him with their admiration, so that he really was more at ease in their little drawing-room than anywhere at Monks Horton, whither the Italians could penetrate. The marchesino spoke English very well, but that was all the worse for Mark, since it gave such a sense of inferiority. He was an intelligent man too, bent on being acquainted with English industries of all kinds; and thus it was that a party was organised to see the umbrella factory. It was conducted by Mr. Dutton, with whom Lord Kirkaldy, between charities and public business, had become acquainted.

To Mark's secret shame, this manufacturer spoke

French perfectly, and even got into such a lively conversation with the old marquis about Cavour, that Lord Kirkaldy begged him to come to dinner and continue it. They were all surprised, not only by the details of the manufacture and the multitude of artizans, male and female, whom it employed, but by the number of warehouse-clerks whom they found at work, and who, it appeared, were in correspondence with agencies and depots in London and all the principal towns in the kingdom. Gerard Godfrey was there,—casting looks askance at the young Egremont, whom he regarded as a kind of robber.

The marchesino asked from what class these young men were taken, and Mr. Dutton made reply that most of them were sons of professional men. If they could obtain a small capital and take shares in the business they were encouraged to do so, and rose to the headship of the agencies, obtaining a fair income.

'And you don't exact an examination,' said Mark.

'Except in handwriting and book-keeping,' said Mr. Dutton.

'Poor Mark, you look for your bugbear everywhere!' sighed his aunt.

They went over the Institute, coffee-rooms, eating-rooms, and lodging-houses, by which the umbrella firm strove to keep their hands respectable and contented, and were highly pleased with all, most especially with Mr. Dutton, who, though his name did not come prominently forward, had been the prime mover and contriver of all these things, and might have been a

wealthier man if he had not undertaken expenses which he could not charge upon the company.

Gerard Godfrey came in to Mrs. Nugent's that evening in the lowest spirits. He had a sister married to a curate in the same county with Bridgefield, and she had sent him a local paper which 'understood that a marriage was arranged between Mark de Lyonnais Egremont, Esquire, and Ursula, daughter of Alwyn Piercefield Egremont, Esquire, of Bridgefield Egremont,' and he could not help coming to display it to Miss Headworth in all its impertinence and prematurity.

'Indeed he said nothing to me about it,' said Miss Headworth, 'and I think he would if it had been true.'

'No doubt he intends it, and is trying to recommend himself through you,' said Gerard.

'I should not think he needed that,' returned Aunt Ursel, 'though I should be very glad, I am sure. He is an excellent young man, and it is quite the obvious thing.'

'People don't always do the obvious thing,' put in Mary Nugent.

'Certainly it didn't look like it,' said Miss Headworth, 'when he told us about the great annual Hunt Ball at Redcastle that Nuttie and his sister Blanche are to come out at; he said he did not intend to go home for it if he could help it.'

'Struggling against fate,' said Miss Nugent.

'The puppy!' burst out Gerard.

Having ascertained the particulars of this same

Hunt Ball, Gerard became possessed with a vehement desire to visit his sister, and so earnestly solicited a few days' leave of absence that it was granted to him. 'Poor boy, he may settle down when he has ascertained what an ass he is,' said Mr. Dutton.

'Ah!' said Mary. 'I thought he was very bad when I saw he had not changed the green markers for St. Luke's Day.'

CHAPTER XIII.

DETRIMENTALS.

'That tongue of yours at times wags more than charity allows ;
And if you're strong, be merciful, great woman of three cows.'
J. C. Mangan.

Nine miles was a severe distance through country lanes in November to go to a ball; but the Redcastle Hunt Ball was the ball of the year, uniting all the county magnates; and young ladies were hardly reckoned as 'come out' till they had appeared there. Mrs. Egremont's position would hardly be established till she had been presented to the notabilities who lived beyond calling intercourse; and her husband prepared himself to be victimised with an amount of grumbling that was intended to impress her with the magnitude of the sacrifice, but which only made her offer to forego the gaiety, and be told that she would never have any common sense.

So their carriage led the way, and was followed by the Rectory waggonette containing the ladies and Mark, who had been decisively summoned home, since his stepmother disliked public balls without a gentleman

in attendance, and his father was not to be detached from his fireside.

And in a group near the door, got up as elaborately as his powers could accomplish, stood Gerald Godfrey. He knew nobody there except a family in his sister's parish, who had good-naturedly given him a seat in their fly, and having fulfilled his duty by asking the daughter to dance, he had nothing to disturb him in watching for the cynosure whose attraction had led him into these unknown regions, and, as he remembered with a qualm, on the eve of St. Britius. However, with such a purpose, one might surely grant oneself a dispensation from the vigil of a black letter saint.

There at length he beheld the entrance. There was the ogre himself, high bred, almost handsome, as long as he was not too closely scrutinised, and on his arm the well-known figure, metamorphosed by delicately-tinted satin sheen and pearls, and still more by the gentle blushing gladness on the fair cheeks and the soft eyes that used to droop. Then followed a stately form in mulberry moiré and point lace, leaning on Gerard's more especial abhorrence,—'that puppy,' who had been the author of all the mischief; and behind them three girls, one in black, the other two in white, and, what was provoking, he really could not decide which was Ursula. The carefully-dressed hair and stylish evening dress and equipments had altogether transformed the little homely schoolgirl so that, though he was sure that she was not the fair-haired damsel with pale blue flowers, he did not know how

to decide between the white and daisies and the black and grasses. Indeed, he thought the two whites most likely to be sisters, and all the more when the black lace halted to exchange greetings with some one, and her face put on an expression so familiar to him, that he started forward and tried to catch her eye; but in vain, and he suffered agonies of doubt whether she had been perverted by greatness.

It was some comfort that, when presently a rush of waltzers floated by, she was not with her cousin; but to provoke him still more, as the daisies neared him, he beheld for a moment in the whirl the queer smile, half-frightened, half-exultant, which he had seen on Nuttie's face when swinging sky-high!

When the pause came and people walked about, the black lady stood talking so near him that he ventured at last on a step forward and an eager 'Miss Egremont,' but, as she turned, he found himself obliged to say, 'I beg your pardon.'

'Did you mean my cousin. We often get mistaken for each other,' said May civilly.

He brightened. 'I beg your pardon,' he said, 'I knew her at Micklethwayte. I am here—quite by accident. Mrs. Elmore was so good as to bring me.'

May was rather entertained. 'There's my cousin,' she said, 'Lord Philip Molyneux is asking her to dance,' and she left him most unnecessarily infuriated with Lord Philip Molyneux.

A steward introduced him to a dull-looking girl, but fortune favoured him, for this time he did catch the

real Nuttie's eye, and all herself, as soon as the dance was over, she came up with outstretched hands, 'Oh Gerard! to think of your being here! Come to mother!'

And, beautiful and radiant, Mrs. Egremont was greeting him, and there were ten minutes of delicious exchange of news. But 'pleasures are as poppies fled,' Nuttie had no dance to spare, her card was full, and she had not learnt fashionable effrontery enough to play tricks with engagements, and just then Mr. Egremont descended on them—'I wish to introduce you to the Duchess,' he said to his wife; and on the way he demanded—'Who is that young cub?'

Gerard Godfrey—an old neighbour.'

'I thought I had seen him racketing about there with Ursula. I'll not have those umbrella fellows coming about!'

'Does he really make umbrellas, Nuttie?' asked Blanche, catching her hand.

'No such thing!' said Nuttie hotly, 'he is in the office. His father was a surgeon; his sisters married clergymen!'

'And he came here to meet you,' said Annaple Ruthven. 'Poor fellow, what a shame it is! Can't you give him one turn!'

'Oh dear! I'm engaged all through! To Mark this time.'

'Give him one of the extras! Throw Mark over to me! No,' as she looked at the faces of the two girls, 'I suppose that wouldn't do, but I'm free this time—I'm not the fashion. Introduce me; I'll do my best as consolation.'

Nuttie had just performed the feat, with great shyness, when Mark appeared, having been sent in quest of his cousin, when her father perceived that she had hung back.

Poor Gerard led off Miss Ruthven the more gloomily, and could not help sighing out, 'I suppose that is an engagement!'

'Oh! you believe that impertinent gossip in the paper,' returned Annaple. 'I wonder they don't contradict it; but perhaps they treat it with magnificent scorn.'

'No doubt they know that it is only premature.'

'If *they* means the elders, I daresay they wish it, but we aren't in France or Italy.'

'Then you don't think, Miss Ruthven, that it will come off?'

'I don't see the slightest present prospect,' said Annaple, unable to resist the kindly impulse of giving immediate pleasure, though she knew the prospect might be even slighter for her partner.

However, he 'footed it' all the more lightly and joyously for the assurance, and the good-natured maiden afterwards made him conduct her to the tea-room, whither Mark and Nuttie were also tending, and there all four contrived to get mixed up together; and Nuttie had time to hear of Monsieur's new accomplishment of going home for Mr. Dutton's luncheon and bringing it in a basket to the office, before fate again descended; Mr. Egremont, who had been at the far end of the room among some congeners, who preferred stronger refreshment, suddenly heard her laugh,

stepped up, and, with a look of thunder towards her, observed in a low voice, 'Mark, you will oblige me by taking your cousin back to her mother.'

'The gray tyrant father,' murmured Annaple in sympathy. 'That being the case, I may as well go back in that direction also.'

This resulted in finding Lady Delmar and the two Mrs. Egremonts together, comparing notes about the two different roads to Redcastle from their several homes.

Lady Delmar was declaring that her coachman was the most obstinate man in existence, and that her husband believed in him to any extent.

'Which way did you come?' she asked.

'By Bankside Lane,' said the Canoness.

'Over Bluepost Bridge! There, Janet,' said Annaple.

'So much the worse. I know we shall come to grief over Bluepost Bridge, and now there will be treble weight to break it down. I dreamt it, I tell you, and there's second sight in the family.'

'Yes, but you should tell what you did dream, Janet,' said her sister. 'She thought Robinson, the coachman, was waltzing with her over it, and they went into a hole and stuck fast, while the red-flag traction engineman prodded her with an umbrella till she was all over blood. Now, if it had been anything rational, I should have thought something of her second sight! I tell her 'twas suggested by—

'"London Bridge is broken down,
Dance o'er my lady Lee!"'

'Well, I am quite certain those traction-engines will break it some time or other,' said Lady Delmar. 'I am always trying to get John to bring it before the magistrates, but he only laughs at me, and nothing will induce Robinson to go the other way, because they have just been mending the road on Lescombe Hill! Annaple, my dear, I can't allow you another waltz; Mark must excuse you—I am going. It is half-past two, and the carriage was ordered at two! Robinson will be in a worse temper than ever if we keep him waiting.'

She bore her sister off to the cloak-room, and there, nearly an hour later, the Egremonts found them still waiting the pleasure of the implacable Robinson; but what was that in consideration of having kept her sister from such a detrimental as poor Mark had become? So muttered Mr. Egremont, in the satisfaction of having himself, with gentlemanly severity, intimated the insuperable gulf between Miss Egremont of Bridgefield and the Man of Umbrellas.

Moreover, his sister-in-law took care that he should hear that the Duchess of Redcastle had pronounced his wife sweetly pretty and lady-like, and talked of inviting them for a visit of a few nights.

'A bore,' observed he ungratefully, ''tis as dull as ditchwater.' But, in truth, though the Canon's family, when in residence, were intimate with the ducal family, Alwyn Egremont had never been at the castle since the days of his earliest youth, and he was not quite prepared to owe his toleration

there to his wife's charms, or the Canoness's patronage of her.

And innocent Alice only knew that everybody had been very kind to her, and it was only a pity that her husband did not like her to notice poor Gerard Godfrey.

CHAPTER XIV.

GOING AGEE.

'Gin ye were a brig as auld as me.'—BURNS.

'WHAT'S the matter?' exclaimed Mrs. Egremont, waking from a doze,—'that bridge?'

'Bridge! Don't be such a fool! We aren't near it yet.'

The servant, his face looking blurred through the window, came to explain that the delay was caused by an agricultural engine, which had chosen this unlucky night, or morning, to travel from one farm to another. There was a long delay, while the monster could be heard coughing frightfully before it could be backed with its spiky companion into a field so as to let the carriages pass by; and meantime Mr. Egremont was betrayed into uttering ejaculations which made poor Nuttie round her eyes in the dark as she sat by his feet on the back seat, and Alice try to bury her ears in her hood in the corner.

On they went at last, for about a mile, and then came another sudden stop—another fierce growl from

Mr. Egremont, another apparition of the servant at the window, saying, in his alert deferential manner, 'Sir, the bridge have broke under a carriage in front. Lady Delmar's, sir. The horse is plunging terrible.'

The door was torn open, and all three, regardless of ball costumes, precipitated themselves out.

The moon was up, and they saw the Rectory carriage safe on the road before them, but on the bridge beyond was a struggling mass, dimly illuminated by a single carriage lamp. Mr. Egremont and the groom hurried forward where Mark and the Rectory coachman were already rendering what help they could, May standing at the horses' heads, and her mother trying to wrap everybody up, since stay in their carriages they could not. Transferring the horses to Nuttie, the two sisters hurried on towards the scene of action, but Blanche's white satin boots did not carry her far, and she turned on meeting her uncle. He spoke with a briskness and alacrity that made him like another man in this emergency, as he assured the anxious ladies that their friends were safe, but that they could not be extricated till the carriage was lifted from the hole into which it had sunk amid bricks, stones, and broken timbers. He sent his own coachman to assist, as being the stronger man, and, mounting the box, turned and drove off in quest of further help, at a wayside cottage, or from the attendants on the engine, whose weight had probably done the mischief, and prepared the trap for the next comer.

As May came near, her brother made her available by putting the lamp into her hand, bidding her hold it so as to light those who were endeavouring to release the horse, which had cleared the portion of the bridge before the break-down under the brougham, and now lay on the road, its struggles quelled by a servant at its head. Nearly the whole of the hind wheels and most of the door had disappeared on one side, and, though more was visible on the other, it was impossible to open the door, as a mass of rubbish lay on it. Annaple was on this side, and her voice was heard calling to May in fits of the laughter which is perhaps near akin to screams—

"'London bridge is broken down,
Dance o'er my lady Lee!"

Janet will go in for second-sight ever after. Yes, she's all right, except a scratch from the glass, and that I'm sitting on her more or less. How are they getting on?' 'The horse is all but out. Not hurt, they think. Here's another man come to help—a gentleman—my dear, it is your partner, Nuttie's umbrella man.' 'Oh, making it complete—hopes, Janet—I'm sorry, but I can't help squashing you! I can't help subsiding on you! What is it now?' as the lamp-light vanished.

'They are looking for something to make levers of,' returned May; 'these wooden rails are too rotten.

'Can't they get us through the window?' sighed a muffled voice.

'Not unless we could be elongated, like the Hope of the Katzekopfs.'

'We shall manage now,' cried Mark; 'we have found some iron bars to the hatch down there. But you must prepare for a shock or two before you can be set free.'

The two gentlemen and three servants strove and struggled, hoisted and pushed, to the tune of suppressed sounds, half of sobs, half of laughter, till at last the carriage was heaved up sufficiently to be dragged backwards beyond the hole; but even then it would not stand, for the wheels on the undermost site were crushed, neither could either door be readily opened, one being smashed in, and the other jammed fast. Annaple, however, still tried to keep up her own spirits and her sister's, observing that she now knew how to sympathise with Johnnie's tin soldiers in their box turned upside down.

Two sturdy labourers here made their appearance, having been roused in the cottage and brought back by Mr. Egremont, and at last one door was forced open by main force, and the ladies emerged, Annaple, helping her sister, beginning some droll thanks, but pausing as she perceived that Lady Delmar's dress was covered with blood.

'My dear Janet. This is worse than I guessed. Why did you not speak?'

'It is not much,' said the poor lady, rather faintly. 'My neck——'

The elder ladies came about her, and seated her on

cushions, where, by the light of May's lamp, Alice, who had been to an ambulance class at Micklethwayte, detected the extent of the cut, extracted a fragment of glass, and staunched the bleeding with handkerchiefs and strips of the girls' tulle skirts, but she advised her patient to be driven at once to a surgeon to secure that no morsel of glass remained. Mr. Egremont, gratified to see his wife come to the front, undertook to drive her back to Redcastle. Indeed, they must return thither to cross by the higher bridge. 'You will go with me,' entreated Lady Delmar, holding Alice's hand; and the one hastily consigning Nuttie to her aunt's care, the other giving injunctions not to alarm her mother to Annaple, who had declared her intention of walking home, the two ladies went off under Mr. Egremont's escort.

Just then it was discovered that the Delmar coachman, Robinson, had all this time been lying insensible, not dead, for he moaned, but apparently with a broken leg, if nothing worse. Indeed, the men had known it all along, but, until the ladies had been rescued, nothing had been possible but to put his cushion under his head and his rug over him. The ladies were much shocked, and Mrs. William Egremont decided that he must be laid at the bottom of the waggonette, and that she would take him straight to the hospital.

They were only a mile and a half from Lescombe, and it was pronounced safe to cross on foot by the remains of the bridge, so that Annaple, who had a pair of fur boots, had already decided on going home

on foot. The other girls wanted to accompany her, and, as May and Nuttie both had overshoes, they were permitted to do so, and desired to go to bed, and wait to be picked up by the waggonette, which must return to Bridgefield by the Lescombe road. Blanche, having a delicate throat, was sentenced to go with her step-mother. Mark undertook to ride the horse through the river, and escort the three girls, and Gerard Godfrey also joined them. The place where he was staying lay a couple of miles beyond Lescombe, and when Mrs. Elmore's fly had been met and turned back by Mr. Egremont, he had jumped off to render assistance, and had done so effectively enough to win Mark's gratitude.

It was by this time about half-past five, as was ascertained by the light of the waning moon, the carriage-lamp having burnt out. It was a fine frosty morning, and the moon was still powerful enough to reveal the droll figures of the girls. May had a fur cloak, with the hood tied over her head by Mrs. Egremont's lace shawl; Nuttie had a huge white cloud over her head, and a light blue opera cloak; Annaple had 'rowed herself in a plaidie' like the Scotch girl she was, and her eyes flashed out merrily from its dark folds. They all disdained the gentlemen's self-denying offers of their ulsters, and only Nuttie consented to have the carriage-rug added to her trappings, and ingeniously tied on cloak-fashion with her sash by Gerard. He and Mark piloted the three ladies over the narrow border of the hole, which looked a

very black open gulf. Annaple had thanked the men, and bidden them come to Lescombe the next day to be paid for their assistance. Then they all stood to watch Mark ride through the river, at the shallowest place, indicated both by her and the labourers. It was perfectly fordable, so Annaple's were mock heroics when she quoted—

> 'Never heavier man and horse
> Stemmed a midnight torrent's force.'

And Nuttie responded in a few seconds—

> 'Yet through good heart and our Ladye's grace
> Full soon he gained the landing place.'

They were both in high spirits, admiring each other's droll appearance, and speculating on the ghosts they might appear to any one who chanced to look out of window. Annaple walked at the horse's head, calling him poor old Robin Hood, and caressing him, while Gerard and Nuttie kept together.

May began to repent of her determination to walk; Lescombe seemed very far off, and she had an instinct that she was an awkward fifth wheel. Either because Robin Hood walked too fast for her weary limbs, or because she felt it a greater duty to chaperon Nuttie than Annaple, she fell back on the couple in the rear, and was rather surprised at the tenor of their conversation.

This 'umbrella man' was telling of his vicar's delight in the beautiful chalice veil that had been sent by Mrs. Egremont, and Nuttie was communicating, as

a secret she ought not to tell, that mother was working a set of stoles, and hoped to have the white ones ready by the dedication anniversary; also that there was a box being filled for the St. Ambrose Christmas tree. They were trying to get something nice for each of the choir boys and of the old women; and therewith, to May's surprise, this youth, whom she regarded as a sort of shopman, fell into full narration of all the events of a highly-worked parish,—all about the choral festival, and the guilds, and the choir, and the temperance work. A great deal of it was a strange language to May, but she half-disapproved of it, as entirely unlike the 'soberness' of Bridgefield ways, and like the Redcastle vicar, whom her father commonly called 'that madman.' Still, she had a practical soul for parish work, and could appreciate the earnestness that manifested itself, and the exertions made for people of the classes whom she had always supposed too bad or else too well off to come under clerical supervision. And her aunt and cousin and this young man all evidently had their hearts in it! For Nuttie—though her new world had put the old one apparently aside—had plunged into all the old interests, and asked questions eagerly, and listened to their answers, as if Micklethwayte news was water to the thirsty. The two were too happy to meet, and, it must be confessed, had not quite manners enough, to feel it needful to include in their conversation the weary figure that plodded along at a little distance from them, hardly attending to the details of their chatter, yet deriving new notions

from it of the former life of Ursula and her mother, matters which she had hitherto thought beneath her attention, except so far as to be thankful that they had emerged from it so presentable. That it was a more actively religious, and perhaps a more intellectual one than her own, she had thought impossible, where everything *must* be second-rate. And yet, when her attention had wandered from an account of Mr. Dutton's dealings with a refractory choir boy bent on going to the races, she found a discussion going on about some past lectures upon astronomy, and Nuttie vehemently regretting the not attending two courses promised for the coming winter upon electricity and on Italian art, and mournfully observing, 'We never go to anything sensible here.'

May at first thought, 'Impertinent little thing,' and felt affronted, but then owned to herself that it was all too true. Otherwise there was hardly anything said about the contrast with Nuttie's present life; Gerard knew already that the church atmosphere was very different, and with the rector's daughter within earshot, he could not utter his commiseration, nor Nuttie her regrets.

Once there was a general start, and the whole five came together at the sight of a spectrally black apparition, with a huge tufted head on high, bearing down over a low hedge upon them. Nobody screamed except Nuttie, but everybody started, though the next moment it was plain that they were only chimney-sweepers on their way.

'Retribution for our desire to act ghosts!' said Annaple, when the sable forms had been warned of the broken bridge. 'Poor May, you are awfully tired! Shouldn't you like a lift in their cart?'

'Or I could put you up on Robin Hood,' said Mark.

'Thank you, I don't think I could stick on. Is it much farther?'

'Only up the hill and across the park,' said Annaple, still cheerily.'

'Take my arm, old woman,' said Mark, and then there was a pause, before Annaple said in an odd voice, 'You may tell her, Mark.'

'Oh, Annaple! Mark! is it so?' cried May joyously, but under her breath; and with a glance to see how near the other couple were.

'Yes,' said Annaple between crying and laughing. 'Poor Janet, she'll think we have taken a frightfully mean advantage of her, but I am sure I never dreamt of such a thing; and the queer thing is, that Mark says she put it into his head!'

'No, no,' said Mark; 'you know better than that——'

'Why, you told me you only found it out when she began to trample on the fallen——'

'I told you I had only understood my own heart.'

'And I said very much the same—she made me so angry, you see.'

'I can't but admire your motives!' said May, exceedingly rejoiced all the time, and ready to have

embraced them both, if it had not been for the spectators behind. 'In fact, it was opposition you both wanted. I wonder how long you would have gone on not finding it out, if all had been smooth!'

'The worst of it is,' said Annaple, 'that I'm afraid it is a very bad thing for Mark.'

'Not a bit of it,' retorted he. 'It is the only thing that could have put life into my work, or made me care to find any! And find it I *will* now! Must we let the whole world in to know before I have found it, Annaple?'

'I could not but tell my mother,' said Annaple. 'It would come out in spite of me, even if I wished to keep it back.'

'Oh yes! Lady Ronnisglen is a different thing,' said Mark. 'Just as May here is——'

'And she will say nothing, I know, till we are ready—my dear old minnie,' said Annaple. 'Only, Mark, do pray have something definite to hinder Janet with if there are any symptoms of hawking her commodity about.'

'I *will*,' said Mark. 'If we could only emigrate!'

'Ah, if we could!' said Annaple. 'Ronald is doing so well in New Zealand, but I don't think my mother could spare me. She could not come out, and she must be with me, wherever I am. You know—don't you—that I am seven years younger than Alick. I was a regular surprise, and the old nurse at Ronnisglen said 'Depend upon it, my Leddy, she is given to be the comfort of your old age.' And I have always

made up my mind never to leave her. I don't think she would get on with Janet or any of them without me, so you'll have to take her too, Mark.'

'With all my heart,' he answered. 'And, indeed, I have promised my father not to emigrate. I must, and will, find work at hand, and make a home for you both!'

'But you will tell papa at once?' said May. 'It will hurt him if you do not.'

'You are right, May; I knew it when Annaple spoke of her mother, but there is no need that it should go further.'

The intelligence had lightened the way a good deal, and they were at the lodge gates by this time. Gerard began rather ruefully to take leave; but Annaple, in large-hearted happiness and gratitude, begged him to come and rest at the house, and wait for daylight, and this he was only too glad to do, especially as May's secession had made the conversation a little more personal.

Nuttie was in a certain way realising for the first time what her mother's loyalty had checked her in expressing, even if the tumult of novelties had given her full time to dwell on it.

'Everybody outside is kind,' she said to Gerard; 'they are nice in a way, and good, but oh! they are centuries behind in church matters and feeling, just like the old rector.'

'I gathered that; I am very sorry for you. Is there no one fit to be a guide?'

'I don't know,' said Nuttie. 'I didn't think—I must, somehow, before Lent.'

'There is Advent close at hand,' he said gravely. 'If you could only be at our mission services; we hope to get Father Smith!'

'Oh, if only I could! But mother never likes to talk about those kind of things. She says our duty is to my father.'

'Not the foremost.'

'No, she would not say that. But oh, Gerard! if he should be making her worldly!'

'It must be your work to hinder it,' he said, looking at her affectionately.

'Oh, Gerard! but I'm afraid I'm getting so myself. I have thought a great deal about lawn-tennis, and dress, and this ball,' said Nuttie. 'Somehow it has never quite felt real, but as if I were out on a visit.'

'You are in it, but not of it,' said Gerard admiringly.

'No, I'm not so good as that! I like it all—almost all. I thought I liked it better till you came and brought a real true breath of Micklethwayte. Oh! if I could only see Monsieur's dear curly head and bright eyes!'

This had been the tenor of the talk, and these were the actual last words before the whole five—just in the first streaks of dawn—coalesced before the front door, to be admitted by a sleepy servant; Mark tied up the horse for a moment, while Annaple sent the man to waken Sir John Delmar, and say there had

been a slight accident, but no one was much hurt; and, as they all entered the warm, dimly-lighted hall, they were keenly sensible that they had been dancing or walking all night.

Rest in the chairs which stood round the big hearth and smouldering wood-fire was so extremely comfortable, as they all dropped down, that nobody moved or spoke, or knew how long it was before there was a voice on the stairs—'Eh? what's this, Annaple? An accident? Where's Janet?' and a tall burly figure, candle in hand, in a dressing-gown and slippers, was added to the group.

'Janet will be at home presently, I hope,' said Annaple, 'but she got a cut with some broken glass, and we sent her round by Dr. Raymond's to get it set to rights. Oh, John! we came to grief on Bluepost Bridge after all, and I'm afraid Robinson has got his leg broken!'

Sir John was a good-natured heavy man, whose clever wife thought for him in all that did not regard horses, dogs, and game. He looked perfectly astounded, and required to have all told him over again before he could fully take it in. Then he uttered a suppressed malediction on engines, insisted that all his impromptu guests should immediately eat, drink, and sleep, and declared his intention of going off at once to Redcastle to see about his wife.

The two gentlemen were committed to the charge of the butler, and Annaple took Nuttie and May to her sister's dressing-room, where she knew she should

find fire and tea, and though they protested that it was not worth while, she made them undress and lie down in a room prepared for them in the meantime. It was a state chamber, with a big bed, far away from the entrance, shuttered and curtained up, and with double doors, excluding all noise. The two cousins lay down, Nuttie dead asleep almost before her head touched the pillow, while May was aching all over, declaring herself far too much tired and excited to sleep; and, besides that it was not worth while, for she should be called for in a very short time. And she remained conscious of a great dread of being roused, so that when she heard her cousin moving about the room, she insisted that they had scarcely lain down, whereupon Nuttie laughed, declared that she had heard a great clock strike twelve before she moved, and showed daylight coming in through the shutters.

'We can't lie here any longer, I suppose,' said May, sitting up wearily; 'and yet what can we put on? It makes one shiver to think of going down to luncheon in a ball dress!'

'Besides, mine is all torn to pieces to make bandages,' said Nuttie. 'I must put on the underskirt and my cloak again.'

'Or Annaple might lend us something. I must get out somehow to know how poor Lady Delmar is, and what has become of everybody. Ring, Ursula, please, and lie down till somebody comes.'

The bell was answered by a maid, who told them that my lady had been brought home by Mr. and Mrs.

Egremont about an hour after their arrival. She was as well as could be expected, and there was no cause for anxiety. Mr. and Mrs. Egremont had then gone on to Bridgefield, leaving word that Mrs. William Egremont and Miss Blanche were sleeping at Redcastle, having sent home for their own dresses and the young ladies', and would call for the rest of their party on the way. Indeed, a box for the Miss Egremonts had been deposited by the Canon from the pony-carriage an hour ago, and was already in the dressing-room; but Miss Ruthven would not have them disturbed. Miss Ruthven,—oh yes, she was up, she had not been in bed at all.

CHAPTER XV.

A CASTLE OF UMBRELLAS.

No, Annaple Ruthven could not have slept, even if she had had time. Her first care had been to receive her sister, who had been met at the entrance of Redcastle by her husband. There had been profuse offers of hospitality to Mr. and Mrs. Egremont, the latter of whom looked tired out, and offers of sending messengers to Bridgefield; but Mr. Egremont would not hear of them, and every one suspected that he would not incur the chance of rising without Gregorio and all his appliances.

By the time they were disposed of, and Lady Delmar safe in bed, it was time to repair to her mother's room, so as to prevent her from being alarmed. Lady Ronnisglen was English born. She was not by any means the typical dowager. Her invalid condition was chiefly owing to an accident, which had rendered her almost incapable of walking, and she was also extremely susceptible of cold, and therefore hardly ever went out; but there was so much youth and life about her at sixty-three that she and Annaple often seemed like

companion sisters, and her shrewd, keen, managing eldest-born like their mother.

Annaple lay down beside her on her bed in the morning twilight, and gave her the history of the accident in playful terms indeed. Annaple could never help that, but there was something in her voice that made Lady Ronnisglen say, when satisfied about Janet's hurt, 'You've more to say, Nannie dear.'

'Yes, minnie mine, I walked home with Mark Egremont.'

'And——?'

'Yes, minnie. He is going to work and make a home—a real, true, homely home for you and me.'

'My child, my child, you have not hung the old woman about the poor boy's neck!'

'As if I would have had him if he did not love her, and make a mother of her!'

'But what is he going to do, Nan? This is a very different thing from——'

'Very different from Janet's notions!' and they both laughed, the mother adding to the mirth by saying—

'Poor Janet, congratulating herself that no harm had been done, and that you had never taken to one another!'

'Did she really now?'

'Oh yes, only yesterday, and I bade her not crow too soon, for I thought I saw symptoms——'

'You dear darling minnie! Think of that! Before we either of us knew it, and when he is worth ever so much than he was before! Not but that I am enraged

when people say he has acted nobly, just as if there had been anything else for him to do!'

'I own that I am glad he has proved himself. I was afraid he would be dragged in the way of his uncle. Don't be furious, Nannie. Not at all into evil, but into loitering; and I should like to know what are his prospects now.'

'Well, mother, I don't think he has any. But he means to have. And not a word is to be said to anybody except you and his father and May till he has looked over the top of the wall, and seen his way. We need not bring Janet down on us till then.'

'I must see him, my dear. Let me see him before he goes away. He always has been a very dear lad, a thoroughly excellent right-minded fellow. Only I must know what he means to do, and whether there is any reasonable chance of employment or fixed purpose.'

Lady Ronnisglen's maid here arrived with her matutinal cup of tea; and Annaple, beginning to perceive that she was very stiff, went off in hopes that her morning toilette would deceive her hardworked little frame into believing it had had a proper night's rest.

She was quite ready to appear at the breakfast table, though her eldest niece, a long-haired, long-limbed girl, considerably the bigger of the two, was only too happy to preside over the cups. All the four young people were in the greatest state of excitement, welcoming, as the heroes of the night, Mark and Mr. Godfrey, and clamouring to be allowed to walk down

after breakfast with their father and the gentlemen to see the scene of the catastrophe and the remains of the carriage and the bridge.

Sir John made a courteous reference to the governess, but there was a general sense that the cat was away, and presently there was a rush upstairs to prepare for the walk. Annaple had time in the course of all the bustle, while the colour came back to her cheeks for a moment, to tell Mark that her mother had been all that was good, and wanted to see him. He must manage to stay till after eleven o'clock; she could not be ready before. Then he might come to her sitting-room, which, as well as her bedroom, was on the ground floor.

Mark had to work off his anxiety by an inspection of the scene of the disaster and a circumstantial explanation of the details to the young Delmars, who crowded round him and Mr. Godfrey, half awed, half delighted, and indeed the youngest—a considerable Tomboy—had nearly given the latter the opportunity of becoming a double hero by tumbling through the broken rail, but he caught her in time, and she only incurred from Sir John such a scolding as a great fright will produce from the easiest of fathers.

Afterwards Mark put Gerard on the way to his brother-in-law's living, asking him on the road so many questions about the umbrella business that the youth was not quite sure how to take it, and doubted whether the young swell supposed that he could talk of nothing else; but his petulance was mitigated when he was

asked, 'Supposing a person wished to enter the business, to whom should he apply?'

'Do you know any one who wishes for anything of the kind?' he asked. 'Are you making inquiries for any one?' and on a hesitating affirmation, 'Because I know there is an opening for a man with capital just at present. Dutton won't advertise—'tis so risky; and he wants some knowledge of a person's antecedents, and whether he is likely to go into it in a liberal, gentlemanly spirit, with good principles, you see, such as would not upset all we are doing for the hands.'

'What amount of capital do you mean?'

'Oh, from five hundred to a thousand! Or more would not come amiss. If I only had it! What it would be to conduct an affair like that on true principles! But luck is against me every way.'

Mark was at the sitting-room door as the four quarters began to strike in preparation for eleven, but Lady Ronnisglen had been in her chair for nearly half-an-hour, having been rapid and nervous enough to hurry even the imperturbable maid, whom Annaple thought incapable of being hastened. She was a little slight woman, with delicate features and pale complexion, such as time deals with gently, and her once yellow hair now softened with silver was turned back in bands beneath the simple net cap that suited her so well. There was a soft yet sparkling look about her as she held out her hands and exclaimed, 'Ah, Master Mark, what mischief have you been doing?'

Mark came and knelt on one knee beside her and

said: 'Will you let me work for you both, Lady Ronnisglen? I will do my best to find some.'

'Ah! that is the point, my dear boy. I should have asked and wished for definite work, if you had come to me before that discovery of yours; and now it is a mere matter of necessity.'

'Yes,' said Mark; then, with some hesitation, he added: 'Lady Ronnisglen, do you care whether I take to what people call a gentleman's profession? I could, of course, go on till I am called to the bar, and then wait for something to turn up; but that would be waiting indeed! Then in other directions I've taken things easy, you see, till I'm too old for examinations. I failed in the only one that was still open to me. Lord Kirkaldy tried me for foreign office work, and was appalled at my blunders. I'm not fit for a parson.'

'I should have thought you were.'

'Not I,' said Mark. 'I'm not up to the mark there. I couldn't say honestly that I was called to it. I wish I could, for it would be the easiest way out of it; but I looked at the service, and I can't. There—that's a nice confession to come to you with! I can't think how I can have been so impudent.'

'Mark, you are a dear good lad. I respect and honour you ever so much more than before all this showed what stuff was in you! But the question is, What's to be done? My child is verily the "penniless lass with a high pedigree," for she has not a poor thousand to call her own.'

'And I have no right to anything in my father's lifetime, though I have no doubt he would give me up my share of my mother's portion—about £3000. Now this is what has occurred to me: In the place where I found my uncle's wife—Micklethwayte, close to Monks Horton—there's a great umbrella factory, with agencies everywhere. There are superior people belonging to it. I've seen some of them, and I've been talking to the young fellow who helped us last night, who is in the office. I find that to go into the thing with such capital as I might hope for, would bring in a much larger and speedier return than I could hope for any other way, if only my belongings would set aside their feelings. And you see there are the Kirkaldys close by to secure her good society.'

Lady Ronnisglen put out her transparent-looking, black-mittened hand, and gave a little dainty pat to his arm. 'I like to see a man in earnest,' said she. Her little Skye terrier was seized with jealousy at her gesture, and came nuzzling in between with his black nose. 'Mull objects!' she said, smiling; but then, with a graver look, 'And so will your father.'

'At first,' said Mark; 'but I think he will give way when he has had time to look at the matter, and sees how good you are. That will make all the difference.'

So Annaple, who had been banished for a little while, was allowed to return, and mother, daughter, and lover built themselves a little castle of umbrellas, and bestowed a little arch commiseration on poor Lady

Delmar; who, it was agreed, need know nothing until something definite was arranged, since Annaple was clearly accountable to no one except her mother. She would certainly think the latter part of her dream only too well realised, and consider that an unfair advantage had been taken of her seclusion in her own room. In spite of all loyal efforts to the contrary, Mark, if he had been in a frame of mind to draw conclusions, would have perceived that the prospect of escaping from the beneficent rule of Lescombe was by no means unpleasant to Lady Ronnisglen. The books that lay within her reach would hardly have found a welcome anywhere else in the house. Sir John was not brilliant, and his wife had turned her native wits to the practical rather than the intellectual line, and had quite enough to think of in keeping up the dignities of Lescombe with a large family amid agricultural difficulties.

Annaple remembered at last that she ought to go and look after her guests, assisted therein by the pleasure of giving May a hearty kiss and light squeeze, with a murmur that 'all was right.'

She brought them downstairs just as the gong was sounding, and the rush of girls descending from the schoolroom, and Lady Ronnisglen being wheeled across the hall in her chair. Nuttie, who had expected to see a gray, passive, silent old lady like Mrs. Nugent, was quite amazed at the bright, lively face and voice that greeted the son-in-law and grandchildren, May and herself, congratulating these two on having been so

well employed all the morning, and observing that she was afraid her Nannie could not give so good an account of herself.

'Well,' said Sir John, 'I am sure she looks as if she found plodding along the lanes as wholesome as sleeping in her bed! Nan Apple-cheeks, eh?'

Whereupon Annaple's cheeks glowed all the more into resemblance of the baby-name which she had long ceased to deserve; but May could see the darkness under her eyes, betraying that it was only excitement that drove away fatigue.

Sir John had not gone far in his circumstantial description of the injuries to his unfortunate carriage when the Canon arrived, with his wife and Blanche. Mark would have given worlds in his impatience to have matters settled between the two parents then and there; but Lady Ronnisglen had already warned him that this would not be possible, and assured him that it would be much wiser to prepare his father beforehand.

Then he fixed his hopes on a solitary drive with his father back in the pony carriage, but he found himself told off to take that home, and had to content himself with May as a companion. Nor was his sister's mode of receiving the umbrella plan reassuring. She had smiled too often with her stepmother over Nuttie's having been brought up among umbrellas to be ready to accept the same lot for her brother and her friend, and she was quite sure that her father would never consent. 'An Egremont an umbrella-maker! how

horrible! Just fancy seeing Dutton, Egremont and Co. on the handle of one's umbrella!'

'Well, you need not patronise us,' said Mark.

'But is it possible that Lady Ronnisglen did not object?' said May.

'She seemed to think it preferable to driving pigs in the Texas, like her son Malcolm.'

'Yes, but then that *was* the Texas.'

'Oh May, May, I did not think you were such a goose!'

'I should have thought the folly was in not being patient. Stick to your profession, and something must come in time.'

'Ay, and how many men do you think are sticking to it in that hope? No, May, 'tis not real patience to wear out the best years of my life and hers in idleness, waiting for something not beneath an Egremont to do!'

'But is there nothing to do better than that?'

'Find it for me, May.'

CHAPTER XVI.

INFRA DIG.

'Till every penny which she told,
Creative Fancy turned to gold.'—R. Lloyd.

The Blueposts Bridge had produced a good deal of effect. Ursula Egremont in special seemed to herself to have been awakened from a strange dream, and to have resumed her real nature and affections. She felt as if she would give all her partners at the ball for one shake of Monsieur's fringed paws; her heart yearned after Aunt Ursel and Miss Mary; she longed after the chants of the choir; and when she thought of the effort poor Gerard Godfrey had made to see her, she felt him a hero, and herself a recreant heroine, who had well-nigh been betrayed into frivolity and desertion of him, and she registered secret resolutions of constancy.

She burnt to pour out to her mother all the Micklethwayte tidings, and all her longings to be there; but when the Rectory party set her down at the door, the footman, with a look of grave importance,

announced that Mr. Egremont was very unwell. 'Mr. Gregory thinks he have taken a chill from the effect of exposure, sir, and Dr. Hamilton has been sent for.'

The Canon and his wife both got out on this intelligence, and Mrs. Egremont was summoned to see them. She came, looking more frightened than they thought the occasion demanded, for she was appalled by the severe pain in the head and eyes; but they comforted her by assuring her that her husband had suffered in the same manner in the spring, and she saw how well he had recovered; and then telling Nuttie to bring word what the doctor's report was, and then spend the evening at the Rectory, they departed, while poor Nuttie only had one kiss, one inquiry whether she were rested, before her mother fled back to the patient.

Nor did she see her again till after the doctor's visit, and then it was only to desire her to tell her uncle that the attack was pronounced to be a return of the illness of last spring, and that it would be expedient to go abroad for the winter.

Go abroad! It had always been a vision of delight to Nuttie, and she could not be greatly concerned at the occasion of it; but she did not find the Rectory in a condition to converse and sympathise. Blanche was lying down with a bad headache. The Edwardses and a whole party of semi-genteel parish visitors had come in to inquire about the accident, and had to be entertained with afternoon tea; and May, though helping her stepmother to do her devoir towards them, seemed more preoccupied than ever.

As indeed she was, for she knew that Mark was putting his fate to the touch with his father in the study.

The Canon heard the proposal with utter consternation and dismay at the perverseness of the two young people, who might have been engaged any time these two years with the full approbation of their families, and now chose the very moment when every one was rejoicing at their freedom.

'When a young man has got into a pickle,' he said, 'the first thing is to want to be married!'

'Exactly so, sir, to give him a motive for getting out of the pickle.'

'Umbrellas! I should like to hear what your grandfather would have said!'

'These are not my grandfather's days, sir.'

'No indeed! There was nothing to do but to give a hint to old Lord de Lyonnais, and he could get you put into any berth you chose. Interest was interest in those days! I don't see why Kirkaldy can't do the same.'

'Not unless I had foreign languages at my tongue's end.'

Whereat the Canon groaned, and Mark had to work again through all the difficulties in the way of the more liberal professions; and the upshot was that his father agreed to drive over to Lescombe the next day and see Lady Ronnisglen. He certainly had always implicitly trusted his son's veracity, but he evidently thought that there must have been much

warping of the imagination to make the young man believe the old Scottish peeress to have consented to her daughter's marrying into an umbrella factory.

Nuttie was surprised and gratified that both Mark and May put her through an examination on the habits of Micklethwayte and the position of Mr. Godfrey, which she thought was entirely due to the favourable impression Gerard had produced, and she felt proportionably proud of him when Mark pronounced him a very nice gentlemanly young fellow. She could not think why her uncle, with more testiness than she had ever seen in that good-natured dignitary, ordered May not to stand chattering there, but to give them some music.

The Canon drove to Lescombe the next day under pretext of inquiring after Lady Delmar, and then almost forgot to do so, after he had ascertained that she was a prisoner to her dressing-room, and that Sir John was out shooting. The result of his interview filled him with astonishment. Lady Ronnisglen having had a large proportion of sons to put out in life on very small means had learnt not to be fastidious, and held that the gentleman might ennoble the vocation instead of the vocation debasing the gentleman. Moreover, in her secret soul she felt that her daughter Janet's manœuvres were far more truly degrading than any form of honest labour; and it was very sore to her to have no power of preventing them, ridicule, protest, or discouragement being all alike treated as the dear mother's old-world unpractical romance. It

galled her likewise that she could perceive the determination that Annaple Ruthven should be disposed of before Muriel Delmar came on the scene; and the retiring to ever so small a home of their own had been discussed between mother and daughter, and only put aside because of the pain it would give their honest-hearted host and their hostess, who really loved them.

Thus she did her best to persuade her old friend that there were few openings for a man of his son's age, and that if the Micklethwayte business were all that Mark imagined, it was not beneath the attention even of a well-born gentleman in these modern days, and would involve less delay than any other plan, except emigration, which was equally dreaded by each parent. Delay there must be, not only in order to ascertain the facts respecting the firm, but to prove whether Mark had any aptitude for the business before involving any capital in it. However every other alternative would involve much longer and more doubtful waiting. And altogether the Canon felt that if a person of Lady Ronnisglen's rank did not object, he had scarcely a right to do so. However, both alike reserved consent until full inquiry should have been made.

The Canon wrote to Lord Kirkaldy, and in the meantime wanted to gather what information he could from his sister-in-law; but he found her absolutely engrossed as her husband's nurse, and scarcely permitted to snatch a meal outside the darkened room. He groaned and grumbled at his brother's selfishness,

and declared that her health would be damaged, while his shrewder lady declared that nothing would be so good for her as to let Alwyn find her indispensable to his comfort, even beyond Gregorio.

This absorption of her mother fell hard on Ursula, especially when the first two days' alarm was over, and her mother was still kept an entire prisoner, as companion rather than nurse. As before, the rheumatic attack fastened upon the head and eyes, causing lengthened suffering, and teaching Mr. Egremont that he had never had so gentle, so skilful, so loving, or altogether so pleasant a slave as his wife, the only person except Gregorio whom, in his irritable state, he would tolerate about him.

His brother could not be entirely kept out, but was never made welcome, more especially when he took upon himself to remonstrate on Alice's being deprived of air, exercise, and rest. He got no thanks; Mr. Egremont snarled, and Alice protested that she was never tired, and needed nothing. The Rectory party were, excepting the schoolroom girls, engaged to make visits from home before going into residence at Redcastle, and were to begin with Monks Horton. They offered to escort Ursula to see her great aunt at Micklethwayte—Oh joy of joys!—but when the Canon made the proposition in his brother's room, Mr. Egremont cut it short with 'I'm not going to have her running after those umbrella-mongers.'

The Canon's heart sank within him at the tone, and he was really very sorry for his niece, who was

likely to have a fortnight or three weeks of comparative solitude before her father was ready to set out on the journey.

'Can't she help you, in reading to her father—or anything?' he asked Alice, who had come out with him into the anteroom to express her warm thanks for the kind proposal.

She shook her head. 'He would not like it, nor I, for her."

'I should think not!' exclaimed the Canon, as his eye fell on the title of a yellow French book on the table. 'I have heard of this! Does he make you read such as this to him, Alice?'

'Nothing else seems to amuse him,' she said. 'Do you think I ought not? I don't understand much of that kind of modern French, but Nuttie knows it better.'

'Not *that kind*, I hope,' said the Canon hastily. 'No, no, my dear,' as he saw her colour mantling, 'small blame to you. You have only to do the best you can with him, poor fellow! Then we'll take anything for you. We've said nothing to Nuttie, Jane said I had better ask you first.'

'Oh, that was kind! I am glad she is spared the disappointment.'

Not that she was. For when she learnt her cousins' destination, she entreated to go with them, and had to be told that the proposal had been made and refused.

There is no denying that she behaved very ill. It

was the first real sharp collision of wills. She had differed from, and disapproved of, her father all along, but what had been required of her had generally been pleasant to one side at least of her nature; but here she was condemned to the dulness of the lonely outsider to a sick room, when her whole soul was leaping back to the delights of her dear old home at Micklethwayte.

She made her mother's brief meal with her such a misery of protests and insistences on pleadings with her father that poor Alice was fain to rejoice when the servants' presence silenced her, and fairly fled from her when the last dish was carried out.

When they met again Nuttie demanded, 'Have you spoken to my father?'

'I told you, my dear, it would be of no use.'

'You promised.'

'No, Nuttie, I did not.'

'I'm sure I understood you to say you would if you could.'

'It was your hopes, my dear child. He is quite determined.'

'And you leave him so. Mother, I can't understand your submitting to show such cruel ingratitude!'

Nuttie was very angry, though she was shocked at the burning colour and hot tears that she beheld as, half choked, her mother said: 'Oh, my dear, my dear, do not speak so! You know—you know it is not in my heart, but my first duty, and yours too, is to your father.'

'Whatever he tells us?' demanded Nuttie, still hot and angry.

'I did not say that,' returned her mother gently, 'but you know, Nuttie, Aunt Ursel herself would say that it is our duty to abide by his decision here.'

'But you could speak to him,' still argued Nuttie, 'what's the use of his being so fond of you if he won't do anything you want?'

'Hush! hush, Nuttie! you know that is not a right way of speaking. I cannot worry him now he is ill. You don't know what that dreadful pain is!'

Happily Nuttie did refrain from saying, 'No doubt it makes him very cross;' but she muttered, 'And so we are to be cut off for ever from Aunt Ursel, and Miss Mary, and—and—every thing good—and nice—and catholic?'

'I hope not, indeed, I hope not. Only he wants us to get the good society manners and tone—like your cousins, you know. You are young enough for it, and a real Egremont, you know Nuttie, and when you have learnt it, he will trust you there,' said the mother, making a very mild version of his speech about the umbrella-mongers.

'Yes, he wants to make me worldly, so that I should not care, but that he never shall do, whatever you may let him do to you.'

His bell rang sharply, and away hurried Alice, leaving her daughter with a miserably sore and impatient heart, and the consciousness of having harshly wounded the mother whom she had meant to protect.

And there was no hugging and kissing to make up for it possible. They would not meet till dinner-time, and Nuttie's mood of stormy repentance had cooled before that time into longing to be more tender than usual towards her mother, but how was that possible during the awful household ceremony of many courses, with three solemn men-servants ministering to them?

And poor Alice jumped up at the end, and ran away as if afraid of fresh objurgations, so that all Nuttie could do was to rush headlong after her, catch her on the landing, kiss her face all over, and exclaim, 'Oh, mother, mother, I was dreadfully cross!'

'There, there! I knew you would be sorry, dear, dear child, I know it is very hard, but let me go. He wants me!'

And a very forlorn and deplorable person was left behind, feeling as if her father, after carrying her away from everything else that she loved, had ended by robbing her of her mother.

She stood on the handsome staircase, and contrasted it with the little cosy entrance at her aunt's. She felt how she hated all these fine surroundings, and how very good and unworldly she was for so doing. Only, was it good to have been so violent towards her mother?

The Rectory folks were dining out, so she could only have recourse to Mudie's box to try to drive dull care away.

A few days more and they were gone. Though Mr. Egremont was gradually mending, he still required his wife to be in constant attendance. In point of

fact Alice could not, and in her loyalty would not, tell her dignified brother-in-law, far less her daughter, of the hint that the doctor had given her, namely, that her husband was lapsing into the constant use of opiates, founded at first on the needs of his malady, but growing into a perilous habit, which accounted for his shutting himself up all the forenoon.

While under medical treatment it was possible to allowance him, and keep him under orders, but Dr. Hamilton warned her not to allow the quantity to be exceeded or the drugs to be resorted to after his recovery, speaking seriously of the consequences of indulgence. He spoke as a duty, but as he looked at the gentle, timid woman, he saw little hope of her doing any good!

Poor Alice was appalled. All she could do was to betake herself to 'the little weapon called All-Prayer,' and therewith to use all vigilance and all her arts of coaxing and cheering away weariness and languor, beguiling sleeplessness, soothing pain by any other means. She had just enough success to prevent her from utterly despairing, and to keep her always on the strain, and at her own cost, for Mr. Egremont was far more irritable when he was without the narcotic, and the serenity it produced was an absolute relief. She soon found too that Gregorio was a contrary power. Once, when he had suggested the dose, and she had replied by citing the physician's commands, Mr. Egremont had muttered an imprecation on doctors, and she had caught a horrible grin of hatred on the man's face,

which seemed to her almost diabolical. She had prevailed then, but the next time her absence was at all prolonged, she found that the opiate had been taken, and her dread of quitting her post increased, though she did not by any means always succeed. Sometimes she was good-humouredly set aside, sometimes roughly told to mind her own business; but she could not relinquish the struggle, and whenever she did succeed in preventing the indulgence she felt a hopefulness that—in spite of himself and Gregorio, she might yet save him.

Another hint she had from both the Canon and his wife. When they asked what place was chosen, Mr. Egremont said he had made Alice write to inquire of the houses to be had at various resorts—Mentone, Nice, Cannes, and the like. She was struck by the ardour with which they both began to praise Nice, Genoa, Sorrento, any place in preference to Mentone, which her husband seemed to know and like the best.

And when she went downstairs with them the Canon held her hand a moment, and said, 'Anywhere but Mentone, my dear.'

She looked bewildered for a moment, and the Canoness added, 'Look in the guide-books.'

Then she remembered Monte Carlo, and for a moment it was to her as shocking a warning as if she had been bidden to keep her husband out of the temptation of thieving.

She resolved, however, to do her best, feeling immediately that again it was a pull of her influence

against Gregorio's. Fortune favoured her so far that the villa favoured by Mr. Egremont was not to be had, only the side of the bay he disliked, and that a pleasant villa offered at Nice.

Should she close with it? Well—was there great haste? Gregorio knew a good many people at Mentone, and could ascertain in his own way if they could get the right side of the bay by going to the hotel and waiting. Alice, however, pressed the matter—represented the danger of falling between two stools, pleaded personal preference, and whereas Mr. Egremont was too lazy for resistance to any persuasion, she obtained permission to engage the Nice villa. The next day Gregorio announced that he had heard that the proprietor of Villa Francaleone at Mentone was giving up hopes of his usual tenants, and an offer might secure it.

'Villa Eugénie at Nice is taken,' said Alice, and she received one of those deadly black looks, which were always like a stab.

Of all this Nuttie knew nothing. She was a good deal thrown with the schoolroom party and with the curate's wife for companionship. Now Mrs. Edwards did not approve of even the canonical Egremonts, having an ideal far beyond the ritual of Bridgefield; and she was delighted to find how entirely Miss Egremont sympathised with her.

Nuttie described St. Ambrose's as a paradise of church observances and parish management, everything becoming embellished and all shortcomings for-

gotten in the loving mists of distance. The harmonium was never out of tune; the choir-boys were only just naughty enough to show how wisely Mr. Spyers dealt with them; the surplices, one would think, never needed washing; Mr. Dutton and Gerard Godfrey were paragons of lay helpers, and district visitors never were troublesome. Mrs. Edwards listened with open ears, and together they bewailed the impractibility of moving the Canon to raising Bridgefield to anything approaching to such a standard; while Nuttie absolutely cultivated her home sickness.

According to promise Blanche wrote to her from Monks Horton, and told her thus much—'We have been all over your umbrella place. It was very curious. Then we called upon Miss Headworth, who was quite well, and was pleased to hear of you.'

Blanche was famous for never putting into a letter what her correspondent wanted to hear, but her stepmother wrote a much longer and more interesting letter to Mrs. Egremont.

'You will be glad to hear that we found your aunt quite well. I suppose it is not in the nature of things that you should not be missed; but I should think your place as well supplied as could be hoped by that very handsome and superior Miss Nugent, with whom she lives. I had a good deal of conversation with both; for you will be surprised to hear that the Canon has consented to Mark's making the experiment of working for a year in Greenleaf and Dutton's office, with a view to entering the firm in future. I was

very anxious to understand from such true ladies what the position would be socially. I longed to talk it over with you beforehand; but Alwyn could never spare you, and it was not a subject to be broached without ample time for discussion. We felt that though the Kirkaldys could tell us much, it was only from the outside, whereas Miss Headworth could speak from within. The decision is of course a blow to his father, and will be still more so to the De Lyonnais family, but they have never done anything to entitle them to have a voice in the matter, and the Kirkaldys agree with us that, though not a path of distinction, it is one of honourable prosperity; and with this, if Mark is content, we have no right to object, since his mind is set on present happiness rather than ambition.'

It was a letter gratifying to Alice in its confidential tone, as well as in the evident approval of those surroundings which she loved so well. She read it to her husband, as she was desired to give him a message that the Canon had not written out of consideration for his eyes. He laughed the laugh that always jarred on her. 'So Master Mark has got his nose to the grindstone, has he?' was his first exclamation, and, after some cogitation, 'The fellow wants to be married, depend on it!'

'Do you think so?' returned Alice wistfully.

'Think! Why you may see it in Jane's letter! I wonder who it is! The little yellow Ruthven girl, most likely! The boy is fool enough for anything!

I thought he would have mended his fortunes with Ursula, but he's too proud to stomach that, I suppose!'

'I did wish that!' said Alice. 'It would have set everything straight, and it would have been so nice for her.'

'You should have cut out your daughter after your own pattern,' he answered; 'not let her be such a raw insignificant little spitfire. 'Tis a pity. I don't want the estate to go out of the name, though I won't leave it to an interfering prig like Mark unless he chooses to take my daughter with it!'

The latter part of this amiable speech was muttered and scarcely heard or attended to by Alice in her struggle to conceal the grief she felt at the uncompromising opinion of her child. Nuttie might outgrow being raw, but there seemed less rather than more prospect of a better understanding with her father. About a week later Mark made his appearance, timing it happily when his uncle was making his toilette, so that his aunt was taking a turn on the sunny terrace with Nuttie when the young man came hurrying up the garden.

'Mark! What? Are you come home?'

'Not the others. They are at Mr. Condamine's. I came last night—by way of Lescombe. Edda, dear, it is all right! Oh, I forgot you did not know! There was no seeing you before we went away. Ah! by the bye, how is my uncle?'

'Much better, except that using his eyes brings

on the pain. What is it, Mark? Ah! I can guess,' she said, aided no doubt by that conjecture of her husband's.

'Yes, yes, yes!' he answered, with a rapidity quite unlike himself. 'Why, Nuttie, how mystified you look!'

'I'm sure I don't wonder at any one being glad to live at dear old Micklethwayte,' said Nuttie slowly. 'But, somehow, I didn't think it of you, Mark.'

'My dear, that's not all!' said her mother.

'Oh!' cried Nuttie, with a prolonged intonation. 'Is it?—Oh, Mark! did you *do it* that night when you led the horse home?'

'Even so, Nuttie! And, Aunt Alice, Lady Ronnisglen is the best and bravest of old ladies, and the wisest. Nobody objects but Lady Delmar, and she declares she shall not consider it an engagement till Ronnisglen has been written to in Nepaul, as if he had anything to do with it; but that matters the less, since they all insist on our waiting till I've had a year's trial at the office! I suppose they could not be expected to do otherwise, but it is a pity, for I'm afraid Lady Delmar will lead Annaple and her mother a life of it.'

'Dear Mark, I am delighted that it is all going so well.'

'I knew you would be! I told them I must tell *you*, though it is not to go any farther.'

So that hope of Mark's restoration to the inheritance faded from Alice, and yet she could not be

concerned for him. She had never seen him in such good spirits, for the sense of failure and disappointment had always been upon him; and the definite prospect of occupation, gilded by his hopes of Annaple, seemed to make a new man of him.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN OLD FRIEND.

'My heart untravelled still returns to thee.'—GOLDSMITH.

To go abroad! Such had been the fairy castle of Nuttie's life. She had dreamed of Swiss mountains, Italian pictures, Rheinland castles, a perpetual panorama of delight, and here she was in one of the great hotels of Paris, as little likely to see the lions of that city as she had been to see those of London.

The party were halting for two days there because the dentist, on whom Mr. Egremont's fine show of teeth depended, practised there; but Nuttie spent great part of the day alone in the sitting-room, and her hand-bag and her mother's, with all their books and little comforts, had been lost in the agony of landing. Her mother's attendance was required all the morning, or what was worse, she expected that it would be, and though Nuttie's persistence dragged out the staid, silent English maid, who had never been abroad before, to walk in the Tuilleries gardens, which they could see from their windows, both felt half-scared the whole

time. Nuttie was quite unused to finding her own way unprotected, and Martin was frightened, cross, and miserable about the bags, which, she averred, had been left by Gregorio's fault. She so hated Gregorio that only a sort of adoration which she entertained for Mrs. Egremont would have induced her to come *tête-à-tête* with him, and perhaps he was visiting his disappointment about Mentone on her. In the afternoon nothing was achieved but a drive in the Bois de Boulogne, when it was at once made evident that Mr. Egremont would tolerate no questions nor exclamations.

His mouth was in no condition for eating in public, and he therefore decreed that his wife and daughter should dine at the *table d'hôte*, while he was served alone by Gregorio. This was a great boon to Nuttie, and to her mother it recalled bridal days long past at Dieppe; but what was their astonishment when on entering the room they beheld the familiar face of Mr. Dutton! It was possible for him to place himself between them, and there is no describing the sense of rest and protection his presence imparted to them, more especially to Nuttie.

He had come over, as he did from time to time, on business connected with the materials he used, and he was beguiled into telling them of his views of Mark, whom he had put in the way of learning the preliminaries needful to an accountant. He had a deep distrust of the business capacities and perseverance of young gentlemen of family, especially with a countess-aunt in the neighbourhood, and quoted Lord Eldon's

saying that to make a good lawyer of one, it was needful for him to have spent both his own and his wife's fortune to begin with, but he allowed that young Mr. Egremont was a very favourable specimen, and was resolutely applying himself to his work, and that he himself felt it due to him to give all the assistance possible.

Miss Headworth, he could not deny, had aged, but far less than Mrs. Nugent in the past year, and it really was a great comfort to Miss Mary to have the old ladies together. He told too how the mission, now lately over, had stirred the Micklethwayte folk into strong excitement, and how good works had been undertaken, evil habits renounced, reconciliations effected, religious services frequented. Would it last? Nobody, he said, had taken it up so zealously as Gerard Godfrey, who seemed as if he would fain throw everything up, and spend his whole life in some direct service as a home missionary or something of the kind. 'He is a good fellow,' said Mr. Dutton, 'and it is quite genuine, but I made him wait at least a year, that he may be sure that this is not only a passing impulse.'

Nuttie thought that she knew what was the impulse that had actuated him, and felt a pleasant elation and self consciousness even while she repressed a sigh of pity for herself and for him. Altogether the dip into the Micklethwayte world was delightful, but when Mr. Dutton began to ask Nuttie what she had seen, she burst out with, 'Nothing—nothing but just a walk and a drive in the Bois de Boulogne;' and her mother explained that 'in Mr. Egremont's state of health,' etc.

'I wonder,' asked Mr. Dutton, 'if I might be allowed——'

Nuttie's eyes sparkled with ecstasy.

It ended in her mother, who had been wondering how Mr. Egremont could be amused all the long evening, arranging that Mr. Dutton should come in an hour's time to call on him, on the chance of being admitted, and that then the offer might be made when she had prepared him for it, advising Nuttie to wait in her own room. She was beginning to learn how to steer between her husband and her daughter, and she did not guess that her old friend was sacrificing one of the best French plays for the chance.

It turned out well; Mr. Egremont was conscious of a want of variety. He demanded whether it was the young fellow, and being satisfied on that part, observed in almost a good-humoured tone, 'So, we are in for umbrellas, we may as well go in for the whole firm!' caused the lights to be lowered under pretext of his eyes—to conceal the lack of teeth—did not absolutely refuse to let Nuttie take advantage of the escort, and when Mr. Dutton did come to the anteroom of the apartment, he was received with full courtesy, though Gregorio looked unutterable contempt. Mr. Dutton was a man who could talk, and had seen a good deal of the world at different times. Mr. Egremont could appreciate intelligent conversation, so that they got on wonderfully well together, over subjects that would have been a mere weariness to Nuttie but for the exceeding satisfaction of hearing

a Micklethwayte voice. At last Mr. Dutton said something about offering his escort to the ladies, or to Miss Egremont, who used, he said in a paternal way, to be a little playfellow of his; Mr. Egremont really smiled, and said, 'Aye, aye, the child is young enough to run after sights. Well, thank you, if you are so good as to take the trouble, they will be very grateful to you, or if her mother cannot go with her, there's the maid.'

Nuttie thought she had never known him so amiable, and hardly durst believe her good fortune would not turn the wheel before morning. And it so far did that her mother found, or thought she found, that it would not do to be out of call, and sent the silent Martin in her stead. But Mr. Dutton had set telegraphs to work and recovered the bags, which Gregorio had professed to give up in despair.

A wonderful amount of lionising was contrived by Mr. Dutton, who had lived a few years at Paris in early youth, and had made himself acquainted alike with what was most worth seeing, and the best ways and means of seeing it, so that as little time as possible was wasted on the unimportant. It was one of the white days of Nuttie's life, wanting nothing but her mother's participation in the sight of the St. Michael of the Louvre, of the Sainte Chapelle, of the vistas in Notre Dame, and of poor Marie Antoinette's cell,—all that they had longed to see together.

She had meant to tell Mr. Dutton that it was all her father's selfishness, but somehow she could not say

so, there was something about him that hindered all unbefitting outbreaks of vexation.

And thus, when she mentioned her disappointment at not being allowed to go to Micklethwayte with her uncle, he answered, 'You could not of course be spared with your father so unwell.'

'Oh, he never let me come near him! I wasn't of the slightest use to him!'

'Mrs. Egremont would have missed you.'

'Really he never gave her time. He perfectly devours her, body and soul. Oh dear, no! 'Twas for no good I was kept there, but just pride and ingratitude, though mother tried to call it being afraid for my manners and my style.'

'In which, if you lapse into such talk, you fully justify the precaution. I was just thinking what a young lady you had grown into,' he answered in a tone of banter, under which, however, she felt a rebuke; and while directing her attention to the Panthéon, he took care to get within hearing again of Martin.

And in looking at these things, he carried her so far below the surface. St. Michael was not so much Raffaelle's triumph of art as the eternal victory over sin; the Sainte Chapelle, spite of all its modern unsanctified gaudiness, was redolent of St. Louis; and the cell of the slaughtered queen was as a martyr's shrine, trod with reverence. There were associations with every turn, and Nuttie might have spent years at Paris with another companion without imbibing so

many impressions as on this December day, when she came home so full of happy chatter that the guests at the *table d'hôte* glanced with amusement at the eager girl as much as with admiration at the beautiful mother. Mr. Dutton had been invited to come and take coffee and spend the evening with them again, but Mr. Egremont's affairs with the dentist had been completed, and he had picked up, or, more strictly speaking, Gregorio had hunted up for him, a couple of French acquaintances, who appeared before long and engrossed him entirely.

Mr. Dutton sat between the two ladies on a stiff dark-green sofa on the opposite side of the room, and under cover of the eager, half-shrieking, gesticulating talk of the Frenchmen they had a quiet low-toned conversation, like old times, Alice said. 'More than old times,' Nuttie added, and perhaps the others both agreed with her.

When the two Englishwomen started at some of the loud French tones, almost imagining they were full of rage and fury, their friend smiled and said that such had been his first notion on coming abroad.

'You have been a great deal abroad?' Mrs. Egremont asked; 'you seem quite at home in Paris.'

'Oh, mamma, he showed me where the school was that he went to, and the house where he lived! Up such an immense way!'

Mr. Dutton was drawn on to tell more of his former life than ever had been known to them. His father, a wine merchant, had died a bankrupt when he was ten

years old, and a relation, engaged in the same business at Paris, had offered to give him a few years of foreign schooling, and then make him useful in the business.

His excellent mother had come with him, and they had lived together on very small means, high up in a many-storied lodging-house, while he daily attended the *Lycée*. His reminiscences were very happy of those days of cheerful contrivance, of her eager desire to make the tiny *appartement* a home to her boy, of their pleasant Sundays and holidays, and the life that in this manner was peculiarly guarded by her influence, and the sense of being all she had upon earth. He had scarcely ever spoken of her before, and he dwelt on her now with a tenderness that showed how she had been the guiding spirit of his life.

At fifteen he was taken into the office at Marseilles, and she went thither with him, but the climate did not agree with her; she drooped, and, moreover, he discovered that the business was not conducted in the honourable manner he had supposed. After a few months of weighing his obligations to his kinsman against these instincts, the question was solved by his cousin's retiring. He resolved to take his mother back to England at any loss, and falling in with one of the partners of the umbrella firm in quest of French silk, he was engaged as foreign correspondent, and brought his mother to Micklethwayte, but not in time to restore her health, and he had been left alone in the world just as he came of age, when a small legacy came to him from his cousin, too late for her to profit by it.

It had been invested in the business, and he had thus gradually risen to his present position. Mrs. Egremont was amazed to hear that his mother had only been dead so short a time before she had herself come to Micklethwayte; and fairly apologised for the surprise she could not help betraying at finding how youthful he had then been, and Nuttie exclaimed, in her original unguarded fashion:

'Why, Mr. Dutton, I always thought you were an old bachelor!'

'Nuttie, my dear!' said her mother in a note of warning, but Mr. Dutton laughed and said:

'Not so far wrong! They tell me I never was a young man.'

'You had always to be everything to your mother,' said Mrs. Egremont softly.

'Yes,' he said, 'and a very blessed thing it was for me.'

'Ah! you don't regret now all that you must have always been giving up for her,' returned Alice.

'No, indeed. Only that I did not give up more.'

'That is always the way.'

'It is indeed. One little knows the whips that a little self-will prepares.'

Nuttie thought he said it for her admonition, and observed, 'But she was good,' only, however, in a mumble, that the other two thought it inexpedient to notice, though it made both hearts ache for her, even Alice's —with an additional pang of self-reproach that she herself was not good enough to help her daughter better.

Neither of them guessed at the effect that a glimpse of the lovely young seeming widow had had on the already grave self-restrained young man in the home lately made lonely, how she had been his secret object for years, and how, when her history was revealed to him, he had still hoped on for a certainty which had come at last as so fatal a shock and overthrow to all his dreams.

A life of self-restraint and self-conquest had rendered it safe for him to thoroughly enjoy the brief intercourse, which had come about by the accident of his having come to dine at the Hôtel de Louvre, to meet a friend who had failed him.

These were two completely happy hours to all the three, and when they said 'good-night' there was a sense of soothing and invigoration on Alice's mind; and on Nuttie's that patience and dutifulness were the best modes of doing justice to her Micklethwayte training, although he had scarcely said a word of direct rebuke or counsel.

While Mr. Dutton sped home to tell Miss Headworth that Mrs. Egremont looked lovelier than ever, and was—yes she was—more of an angel, that her husband had been very pleasant, much better than he expected, and, indeed, might come to anything good under such influence; and as to little Nuttie—she was developing fast, and had a brave constant heart, altogether at Micklethwayte. But that servant who was acting as courier was an insolent scoundrel, who was evidently cheating them to the last degree.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

'True courage often is in frightened eyes.'—
Thoughts and Verses.

All the preliminaries of the sojourn at Nice had been settled in correspondence, and the Egremont family had nothing to do, after arriving at the station, but to drive up to Villa Eugénie, whose flower-wreathed balconies were like a vision of beauty. Servants had been hired through agencies known to Mr. Egremont, and Gregorio looked very black at his mistress keeping the reins in her hand, and tried to make her feel herself inefficient.

It was not an eventful or very interesting part of Ursula's life. She was almost wild with the novelty and beauty of the South at first, but except for what she could thus see, there was little variety. The mould of the day was as much as possible after the Bridgefield fashion, except that there were no cousins at the Rectory, no parish interests, very little society, as far as the ladies were concerned. Mr. Egremont

had old acquaintance and associates with whom he spent afternoons and evenings, after his own fashion, but they were not people to whom he wished to introduce his wife and daughter.

And the superior English habitués of Nice, the families who formed the regular society, knew Mr. Egremont's reputation sufficiently to feel by no means disposed to be cordial to the fair wife and grown-up daughter whom he so unexpectedly produced on the scene. It had been different at home, where he had county standing, and the Canon and Canoness answered for the newcomers; but here, where all sorts of strange people came to the surface, the respectable felt it needful to be very cautious, and though of course one or two ladies had been asked to call through the intervention of Lady Kirkaldy or of Mrs. William Egremont, and had been assured on their authority that it was 'all right,' their attentions were clogged by doubt, and by reluctance to involve their mankind in intimacy with the head of the family. Thus very little of the proverbial gaiety of Nice offered itself to Nuttie and her mother, and, except by a clerical family who knew Mr. Spyers, they were kept at a distance, which Mr. Egremont perceived and resented by permitting no advances. The climate suited him so well that, to his wife's great relief, he seemed to have dropped his inclination for sedatives; but his eyes would not bear much, and she felt bound to be always on the alert, able to amuse him and hinder his feeling it dull. Gregorio highly

disapproved of the house and servants, and was always giving hints that Mentone would agree far better with his master; but every day that Mr. Egremont seemed sufficiently amused at Nice was so much gain, and she had this in her favour, that he was always indolent and hard to move. Moreover, between his master's levée and late dinner Gregorio was hardly ever to be found. No doubt he knew the way to Monte Carlo well enough, and perhaps preferred that the family should be farther off, for he soon ceased to show himself discontented with their present abode. Once when his absence was inconvenient, Mr. Egremont abused him roundly as a good-for-nothing gambler, but when Alice hoped that he might be called to a reckoning, the wrath had subsided with the immediate vexation, and as usual she was told 'All those fellows were alike.'

The foreign servants were not to be induced to give the early-rising ladies more than a roll and cup of coffee, and Nuttie felt ravenous till she learned to lay in a stock of biscuits, and, with Martin's connivance, made tea on her own account, and sustained her mother for the morning's walk before the summons to Mr. Egremont.

He always wanted his wife much earlier in the day, during his hours of deshabille, and letting her write his letters and read the papers to him. She was pleased with this advance, but it gave Nuttie a great deal more solitude, which was sometimes judiciously spent, but it was very hard not to be desultory in

spite of learning lessons in French, Italian, and drawing.

Later in the day came the drive or the visit to the public gardens when the band was playing, but this became less frequent as Mr. Egremont observed the cold civility shown to his wife, and as he likewise grew stronger and made more engagements of his own. Then Nuttie had happy afternoons of driving, donkey-riding, or walking with her mother, sketching, botanising, admiring, and laying up stores for the long descriptive letters that delighted the party in St. Ambrose's Road, drinking in all the charm of the scenery, and entering into it intelligently. They spent a good many evenings alone together likewise, and it could not but give Alice a pang to see the gladness her daughter did not repress when this was the case, even though to herself it meant relaxation of the perpetual vigilance she had to exert when the father and daughter were together to avert collisions. They were certainly not coming nearer to one another, though Nuttie was behaving very well and submissively on the whole, and seldom showing symptoms of rebellion. This went on through the early part of their stay, but latterly there was a growing sense upon the girl that she and her mother were avoided by some young ladies to whom they had been introduced, and whom they saw regularly at the daily services at St. Michael's Church. They were pleasant-looking girls, with whom Nuttie longed to fraternise, and she was mortified at never being allowed to get beyond a few frigidly civil words in the street,

more especially when she came upon sketching parties and picnics in which she was never included.

It was all very well for her mother to answer her murmurs and wonderings with 'You know people are very exclusive, my dear.' Nuttie began to guess that her father and her name were the real reason, and her eyes were further opened later in the spring when Mr. Egremont, who had recovered unusual health and vigour, took his ladies to Mentone to spend a day or two in the newer beauties there. Alice had her misgivings, but the visit was avowedly to show the place to her, and she could not reasonably object. He was in unusual good humour, and even tolerated their ecstasies at the scenery and the flowers, dined at the *table d'hôte* and found acquaintance, enjoyed himself, and in the forenoon, while Nuttie was out wondering and admiring, and going as far as she could drag Martin, he expressed to his wife that she *would* be astonished at the gardens and the music of Monte Carlo.

There, however, Alice made a stand. 'Thank you, it is very kind, but if you please, I should not like to take Ursula to Monte Carlo, or to go there myself,' she said in an apologetic tone.

He laughed. 'What! you are afraid of making the little one a confirmed gambler?'

'You know I am not, but——'

'You think the little prig will be contaminated, eh?'

'Well, I think it will be happier for her if she never sees anything—of the kind.'

'You little foolish Edda, as if her eyes or ears need see anything but flowers and music and good company.'

'I know that, but I had *so much* rather not.' It was a sweet face and caressing voice that implored, and he still was good humoured.

'Well, well, I don't want to drag you, old lady, against your will, though I fancy you would be rather surprised at the real aspect of the abode of iniquity your fancy depicts.'

'Oh, thank you, thank you so much!'

'What an absurd little woman it is! I wonder if you would thank me as heartily supposing I cleared a round thousand and gave you—say a diamond necklace?'

'I am sure I should not!'

'No, I don't believe you would. That restless little conscience of yours would be up on end. After all, I don't know that you are the worse for it, when it looks so prettily out of your brown eyes. I wonder what you expect to see? The ruined gamester shooting himself on every path, eh?'

'No, no; I don't suppose I should see anything horrid or even disagreeable. I know it is all very beautiful; but then every person who goes for the innocent pleasures' sake only helps to keep up the whole thing—evil and all.'

'And what would the old women of all sorts here and at Nice do without such a choice temple of scandal to whet their teeth upon? Well, I suppose you and

your precious daughter can take care of yourselves. There are the gardens, or you can tell Gregorio to order you a carriage.'

'Then you are going?'

'Yes, I promised Grafton. Don't be afraid, Mistress Edda, I'm not going to stake Bridgefield and reduce you to beggary. I'm an old hand, and was a cool one in my worst days, and whatever I get I'll hand over to appease you.'

That was all she could obtain, and she secretly hoped there would be no winnings to perplex her. Thankful that she had not made him angry by the resistance for which she had prepared herself with secret prayer ever since the Mentone scheme had been proposed, she placed herself at Nuttie's disposition for the rest of the day.

They had a charming donkey-ride, and, still unsatiated with beauty, Ursula made her mother come out again to wonder at the trees in the public gardens. Rather tired, they were sitting on a shaded bench, when a voice close to them exclaimed, 'It is; yes, it must be; 'tis the voice—yes, and the face prettier than ever. Little Alice—ah! you don't know me. Time has been kinder to you than to me.'

'Oh! I know you now! I beg your pardon,' cried Alice, recognising in the thin nutcracker parchment visage and shabbily-dressed figure the remnant of the brilliant aquiline countenance and gay attire of eighteen years ago. 'Mrs. Houghton! I am so glad to have

met you, you were so kind to me. And here she is.'

'What! is this the child? Bless me, what a proof how time goes! Young lady, you'll excuse my not knowing you. You were a very inconvenient personage not quite born when I last met your mother. What a likeness! I could have known her for Alwyn Egremont's daughter anywhere!'

'Yes, they all say she is a thorough Egremont.'

'Then it is all right. I saw Alwyn Egremont, Esquire, and family among the arrivals at Nice, but I hardly durst expect that it was you. It seemed too good to be true, though I took care the knot should be tied faster than my gentleman suspected.'

'Oh, please!' cried Alice deprecatingly, at first not apprehending the force of the words, having never known the gulf from which Mrs. Houghton had saved her, and that lady, seeing that the girl was listening with all her ears, thought of little pitchers and restrained her reminiscences, asking with real warm interest, 'And how was it? How did you meet him again?'

'He came and found me out,' said Alice, with satisfaction in her voice.

'Indeed! Not at Dieppe; for he was *en garçon* when I nearly came across him ten years ago at Florence.'

'Oh no! He inquired at Dieppe, but they had lost the address my aunt left.'

'Indeed! I should not have thought it of old

Madame Leroux, she seemed so thoroughly interested in *la pauvre petite*. What did you do? Your aunt wrote to me when your troubles were safely over, and she thought him lost in the poor *Ninon*, that she meant to settle in a place with an awfully long Yorkshire name.'

'Micklethwayte; yes, we lived there, and got on very well. We had boarders, and I had some dear little pupils; but last year Mark Egremont—you remember dear little Mark—was in the neighbourhood, and hearing my name, he told his uncle, who had been seeking us ever since. And he came, Mr. Egremont, and took us home, and oh, the family have been so kind!'

'What? The parson, and that awful old she-lion of a grandmother, whose very name scared you out of your wits?'

'She is dead, and so is dear good Lady Adelaide. Canon Egremont is kindness itself. It was all the old lady's doing, and he knew nothing about it. He was gone to Madeira with Lady Adelaide and got none of our letters, and he never knew that his brother was married to me.'

'Trust Alwyn for that,' Mrs. Houghton muttered. 'Well, all's well that ends well, and I hope he feels due gratitude to me for doing him a good turn against his will. I tried to get at him at Florence to find out what he had done with you, but unluckily I was ill, and had to send through poor Houghton, and he mismanaged it of course, though I actually wrote down

that barbarous address, Mickle something, on a card. I believe he only got as far as the man instead of the master.'

'Ah! I wanted to ask for Captain Houghton,' said Alice, glad to lead the conversation away from revelations of which she had an instinctive dread.

'Gone, my dear! two years ago. Poor fellow! it was low fever, but quite as much want of luck, I shall always believe,' she said.

'Oh, I am sorry! He was so kind to me!' said Alice, squeezing her hand, and looking up with sweet tender commiseration.

'There, there, don't, you pretty creature!' said Mrs. Houghton, putting her hand across her eyes. 'I declare, you've almost made me cry—which I've not done—well, hardly, since I parted with you at Dieppe, thinking you a sweet little flower plucked and thrown away to die, though I had done my best to bind it to him. What care I took not to let Houghton disabuse him about Jersey marriages!'

There is a difference between hearing and hearkening, and Alice Egremont's loving and unsuspecting heart was so entirely closed against evil thoughts of her husband, and so fully occupied with her old friend's condition, that she never took in the signification of all this, while Nuttie, being essentially of a far more shrewd and less confiding nature, and already imbued with extreme distrust of her father, was taking in all these revelations with an open-eyed, silent horror of conviction that her old impressions of the likeness

to Marmion or Theseus had been perfectly correct. It was all under her hat, however, and the elder ladies never thought of her, Alice bringing back the conversation to Mrs. Houghton herself. 'Oh, my dear, I drag on as I can. I've got a fragment of our old income, and when that's run too low, I go up to Monte Carlo—I always had the lucky hand, you know, and 'tis only restitution after all! I'm sick of it all though, and sometimes think I'll take my good sister Anne's offers and go home.'

'Oh do, do!' cried Alice.

'But,' went on the poor woman, 'humble pie goes against me, and think what an amount would be before me—heigh ho!—after nearly five-and-twenty years; yes, five-and-twenty years it is—since Houghton, poor fellow, told me I was too bright and winsome for a little country lawyer's house in a poky street. What would they think of me now?' and she laughed with a sound that was painful to hear. 'Well, Sycorax had done one good deed, and when I look at you, queening it there, I feel that so have I.'

'You were very good to me, I know; but oh, if you would go home to your sister!'

'My dear, you little know what you ask! Anne! Why she is the prime district lady, or whatever you call it, of Dockforth. Think what it would be to her to have this battered old *vaurien* thrown on her hands, to be the stock subject for all the righteous tongues. Besides,' as she coughed, 'the English climate would make an end of me outright. I'm in a bad way

enough here, where I can sit among the lemon trees half the days in the winter, but the English fireside in a stuffy parlour——' and she shuddered.

That shiver reminded all that it was getting late, too late for Mrs. Houghton to be out of doors, and near the time when Mr. Egremont was to meet his ladies at the hotel. Alice begged for Mrs. Houghton's address, and it was given with a short ironical laugh at her promise to call again if possible. 'Aye, if possible,' the poor woman repeated. 'I understand! No, no,' as Alice was about to kiss her. 'I won't have it done.'

'There's no one in sight.'

'As if that made a difference! Alice, child, you are as innocent as the little dove that flew aboard the *Ninon*. How have you done it? Get along with you! No kisses to such as me! I don't know whether it breaks my heart, or binds it up to look at the face of you. Anyway, I can't bear it.'

She hurried away, and made some steps from them. A terrible paroxysm of coughing came on, and Mrs. Egremont hurried towards her, but she waved back all help, shook her head, and insisted on going home. Alice kept her in sight, till she dived into a small side street.

'Mother,' said Nuttie. Then there was a pause. 'Mother, did you know all this?'

'Don't talk of it, Nuttie. It is not a thing to be talked about to any one or by any one. I wish you had not been there.'

'But mother, this once! Did you know?'

'I knew that I knew not what I did when I went on board that yacht, but that God's kind providence was over me in a way that I little deserved. That is all I care to know, and, Ursula, I *will* have not another word about it. No, I will not hear it.'

'I was only going to ask whether you would tell my father.'

'Certainly; but not before you.'

The tone of decision was unwonted, and Nuttie knew she must abide by it, but the last shreds of filial respect towards Mr. Egremont were torn away by what Mrs. Houghton had implied, and the girl dashed up and down her bedroom muttering to herself, 'Oh, why have I such a father? And she, she will not see it, she is wilfully blind! Why not break with him and go home to dear Aunt Ursel and Gerard and Mr. Dutton at once, instead of this horrid, horrid grandeur? Oh, if I could fling all these fine things in his face, and have done with him for ever. Some day I will, when I am of age, and Gerard has won his way.'

Meantime Alice, in some trepidation, but with resolution at the bottom, had told her husband of the meeting with Mrs. Houghton, of her widowhood, sickness, and poverty.

He did not like the intelligence of their meeting, and hoped no one had seen it; then, when reassured on this score, he hummed a little and exclaimed, 'Poor old Flossy Houghton! I don't wonder! They went the pace! Well, what do you want? Twenty pounds

for her! Why, 'twill all be at Monte Carlo in three days' time.'

'It is very good of you, but I want more than that. She is so ill and wretched, you know.'

'I can't have you visiting her, if that's what you mean. Why, after all the pains I've been at to get you on your proper level at home, here's my Lady Louisa and all her crew, in their confounded insolence, fighting shy of you, and you can't give them a better colour for it than by running after a woman like that—divorced to begin with, and known at every gambling table in Europe.'

'I know that, Alwyn, dear Alwyn' (it was very seldom that she called him so, and she put her clasped hands on his shoulder); 'but I am sure she is dying, and she was so good to me, I can't bear doing nothing for her.'

'Well, there's twenty—fifty, if you like.'

'Thank you, thank you, but you know I never meant to visit her—like—like society; only to go sometimes privately and——'

'And how about your daughter?'

'I would not take her on any account. What I want to do is this. Mrs. Houghton spoke of her sister, a kind good woman in England, who would take her home, and love her, if only she could bring herself to go. Now, I think I could persuade her to write, or let me write to the sister—and if only the two were together again! It is very dreadful to think of her dying alone, in the way she is going on!'

'What, little saint, you want to try your hand on her? I should say she was too tough an old sinner for you.'

'Oh, Alwyn! her heart was very near, though she tried to keep it back. I do not want to—to do what you mean—only to get her to let her sister come. I'm sure that would do the rest.'

'If any sister does more than you, you little witch,' he said.

Alice pressed him no more then, but a day or two later, when she knew he had an engagement, she arranged to dispose of Nuttie with the clergyman's wife, and then begged permission to go by train to Mentone, and come back in the evening. He did not like it—no more did she—for she was perfectly unaccustomed to travelling alone, but there was a deep sense of sacred duty upon her, only strengthened by her unwillingness to realise how much she owed to Mrs. Houghton.

She telegraphed that she was coming, and found her friend more touched than she chose to allow at the fact of her visit, declaring that she must have wonderful power over Alwyn Egremont, if she knew how to use it; indeed, the whole tone was of what Alice felt flattery, intended to turn away anything more serious. Poor woman, she was as careful of doing no injury to her young friend's reputation as Mr. Egremont could have desired. Alice had come resolved that she should have one good meal, but she would not hear of eating anywhere in public where either could be

recognised, and the food was brought to a private room in the hotel. To her lodgings she still would not take Alice, nor would she give her sister's address. Except for a genuine shower of tears when Alice insisted on kissing her there seemed no ground gained.

But Alice went again on her husband's next visit to Mentone. He was, to a certain degree, interested in her endeavours, and really wished the poor woman to be under the charge of her relations, instead of dying a miserable lonely death among strangers.

This time Alice had to seek her friend in the dreary *quatrième* of the tall house with the dirty stone stairs. It was a doleful empty room, where, with a mannish-looking dressing-gown and a torn lace scarf tied hood-fashion over her scanty hair, Mrs. Houghton sat over a pan of charcoal oppressive to Alice's English lungs.

'Come again!' she cried. 'Well, I really shall begin to think that angels and ministers of grace exist off the stage! You pretty thing! Let me look at you. Where did you get that delicious little bonnet?'

'Why, it is perfectly plain!'

'So it is! 'Tis only the face that is in it. Now if some folks put this on—sister Anne, for example, what dowdies they would be. Poor old Anne, you must know she had a turn for finery, only she never knew how to gratify it. To see the contortions of her crinolines was the delight of all the grammar school. It was a regular comedy for them to see her get into our

pew edgeways, and once unconsciously she carried off a gentleman's hat on her train.'

So she went on talking, coughing at intervals, and generally using a half-mocking tone, as if defying the tenderness that awoke in spite of her, but always of her original home, and especially of her sister. Alice ventured to ask whether they often heard from one another.

'Good soul, she always writes at Christmas and on my birthday. I know as well as possible that I shall find a letter *poste restante* wherever she heard of me last, and that she hasn't done—I'm ashamed to say for how long—really, I think not since I let her know that I couldn't stand Ivy Lodge, Dockforth, at any price, when she wrote to Monaco on seeing poor Houghton's death in the paper.'

There was a good deal of rambling talk of this kind, to which Alice listened tenderly and compassionately, making no attempt at persuasion, only doing what was possible for the poor lady's comfort. She had procured on her way some fruit and jelly, and some good English tea, at which Mrs. Houghton laughed, saying, 'Time was, I called it cat-lap! Somehow it will seem the elixir of life now, redolent, even milkless, of the days when we were young.'

Then she revealed something of her long, suffering, almost ghastly nights, and Alice gently told how her old friend, Mrs. Nugent, suffered from sleeplessness, and kept a store of soothing psalms and hymns in her memory. There was a little laugh. 'That's for you good folk. I haven't such a thing about me! Come,

Par exemple!' and Alice repeated the first thing she could remember, the verse beginning 'God, who madest earth and heaven.'

'That's one of your charms, is it? Well, it would not be too much for me if my poor old memory would hold it. Say it again.'

Alice generally had about her a tiny prayer-book with 'Hymns, Ancient and Modern,' attached. It had been a gift from Mary Nugent, and she was fond of it, but the opportunity was not to be lost, and she took it out, saying she would bring a larger one and reclaim it. And, as she was finally taking leave, she said with a throbbing heart, 'Do you know that you have betrayed your sister's address? I shall write to her now.'

'If you do——!' cried Mrs. Houghton, in a tone like threatening deprecation, but with a little of her strange banter in it besides. Alice's mind had been made up to do the thing, and she had not felt it honest not to give due warning of her intentions. Even now she was not certain of the lady's surname, but she trusted to her husband's knowledge of Mrs. Houghton's previous history; and not in vain. Mr. Egremont amused himself with a little ridicule at his wife's quixotry, and demanded whether Flossy Houghton was a promising convert; but confessed himself very glad that the poor thing should be off their hands, declaring that it was quite time her own people looked after her, and happily he recollected her maiden name. So the letter was written, after numerous attempts at expressing it suitably, explaining Mrs. Houghton's

illness and the yearnings she was too proud and ashamed to express to her sister, and was answered at once by a few short words of earnest gratitude, and an assurance that Miss Reade was preparing to start at once. Could Mrs. Egremont meet her and prepare her sister?

To Alice's disappointment this could not be. Mr. Egremont had invited some friends to the villa, and would not spare her. She could only send a note, assuring Miss Reade that she believed that preparation would do more harm than good, and she waited and watched anxiously. A card came by the post in Mrs. Houghton's scrawled writing. 'Naughty little wretch!' was all it said, but thence she gathered hope.

The spring was advancing, and Mr. Egremont was in haste to be gone, but Alice obtained one more run to Mentone, and once more climbed up the dark and dirty stairs to the room, where the well-known voice answered her tap, 'Come in! Ah, there she is, the wicked little angel!'

A substantial little roly-poly business-like little woman hurried forward with tearful eyes and outstretched hands. 'Oh, Mrs. Egremont! can I ever thank you enough?'

'You can't, Anne, so don't try. It will be a relief to all parties,' interposed Mrs. Houghton. 'Sentiment is not permitted here.'

Nevertheless she hugged Alice almost convulsively. She was sitting in a comfortable arm-chair, one about which Mrs. Egremont knew something, and the whole aspect of the room had changed indescribably for the

better, as much indeed as Mrs. Houghton's own personal array, which had no longer the desolate neglected look of old.

A little stool was close to her chair, as if the two sisters could not bear to be far apart, and the look of love and content in their eyes as they turned to one another was perfect joy to Alice. She had no longer any doubt that Anne Reade, who had found the wanderer yet a great way off, would yet bring her back to the home, spiritually if not outwardly.

Mrs. Houghton spoke of better rooms when the winter visitors had fled, Anne spoke of her being able to return to Dockforth. Whether that would ever be seemed entirely doubtful to Alice's eyes, especially as the patient's inclination was evidently otherwise. There was nothing to be done but to leave the sisters together, obtaining Miss Reade's ready promise to write, and putting into her hands a sum of money which could be sincerely called 'only a debt of gratitude from my husband and me,' and which would smooth the way either to remaining or returning to England.

Nor was there any return. Ere many weeks had passed Mrs. Egremont heard from Miss Reade how a fresh cold had made it impossible to move, and summer heat had brought on low fever, which had destroyed the feeble strength, but not till 'childhood's star' had again arisen, and a deeply and truly repentant woman had passed away, saved, as it seemed, through that one effort on behalf of the young girl whose innocence she had protected.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE VORTEX.

'With one black shadow at her feet.'—TENNYSON.

THE rebuffs that society had bestowed on his wife and daughter at Nice had rendered Mr. Egremont the more determined on producing them in London and establishing their position. He secured a furnished house in Westburnia before leaving Nice, and, travelling leisurely home without visiting Bridgefield, he took possession the second week in May.

There had not been much correspondence with the Rectory, and on the first forenoon, as Mrs. Egremont and Nuttie were trying to enliven the drawing-room with the flowers sent up to meet them, they were surprised by the entrance of Blanche, full of kisses and welcomes.

'Oh! didn't you know? I'm with the Kirkaldys just round the corner. Aunt Margaret has undertaken to do the part of a noble aunt by me.'

'Then you are here for the season? And May?'

'May wouldn't come, except just for a week to

see the pictures, and lay in a stock of talk. She's grown more parochial than ever, and we believe it is all Hugh Condamine. Oh! I forgot you were gone before we came home last autumn. He is mamma's nephew, you know, and was ordained last year to the curacy of the next parish to his father's place. If the Edwardses only would take themselves off, we would have him at home, and then we should have flowers on the altar, and all sorts of jolly things. Papa would stand ever so much more from him than from the old Edwardses.'

'But is he engaged to May, then?'

'Well, no, not exactly. I believe he does not think it right till he has done preparing for priest's orders. He's ever so strict, you know, and he hasn't got much either; but he means it. Lucy, his sister, you know, told me all about it, and that altogether the elders had settled it was better for both that he should attend to his preparation, and May should not bind herself, though they really understand one another, and so she won't come to London.'

'Oh, that's very good of her!' cried Nuttie; 'but why won't they let them settle their minds and be engaged?'

'People are always tiresome,' said Blanche; 'and I do believe the living is at the bottom of it, at least Lucy thought so. I mean everybody wants to wait—all the old ones, I mean—not Hugh or May, of course—to know whether Mark will stick to the umbrellas, or turn back and be a clergyman, because, then, of

course, he would have the living; and if he doesn't, they want to be certain whether Uncle Alwyn, or you, Nuttie, would promise it to Hugh if he married May!'

'Me!' exclaimed Nuttie.

'My dear, I don't like to hear you talk of such things,' said Mrs. Egremont gently.

'Oh yes, I know—it's all very dreadful. I was only telling you what is in the old people's heads, and what would settle it, and make it all right with them.'

'And how is Mark? Is Miss Ruthven in London?' asked Mrs. Egremont, glad to turn away the conversation from the contingencies of which Blanche spoke with the hardness of youth, as yet not realising sorrow.

'I daresay you know nearly as much of Mark as we do, now the Kirkaldys are up here. All his letters go to Lescombe. Oh no, Annaple is not in London. The Delmars can't afford it, you know, though I believe my lady would have made a stretch if Annaple hadn't been bespoke—but now she reserves herself for Muriel.'

Alice looked with some discomfort at the soft fair-haired creature who was uttering all this worldly jargon in a tone that would have been flippant if it had not been so childish. She asked if Lord Ronnisglen had written.

'Oh yes, long ago. Lady Delmar had tried to make him nasty about it, but he wouldn't be, so that's all right; and Mark seems to get on very well, though it must be horridly dull for him now the Kirkaldys

are away, and he can't spend all his Sundays at Monks Horton.'

'He will get more into the spirit of the place,' said Nuttie, whereat Blanche shrugged her shoulders a little, and exclaimed:

'You've got out of it at any rate, Nuttie!'

'I hope not!'

'Well, then, the look of it! I never saw any one so improved! Isn't she, Aunt Alice? She's grown, I declare! Yes'—measuring herself against her cousin —'I was a leetle bit taller when you came, and now you've got above me! and what a duck of a way of doing your hair! You must show me! I must tell May there's no fear of your being taken for one another now; Aunt Margaret will be quite surprised.'

It was true that Ursula had developed a good deal during the last year, and, under the experienced hands of Martin, had lost her schoolgirl air, and turned into a young lady capable of becoming the Paris outfit which her father had enjoined. Without positive beauty, she was a pleasing, intelligent, animated girl, with the reputation of being an heiress, with a romance in the background, and there was nothing to prevent her from being a success. The family connections, with Lady Kirkaldy to set the example, had determined on giving full support to Mrs. Egremont, and, as of course every one liked to look at so lovely a face, the way of both was smoothed in a manner that delighted her husband when they encountered any of those who had looked coldly on her at Nice.

He would have had her presented, but her own reluctance and the united counsels of Lady Kirkaldy and the Canoness prevailed on him to drop the idea; and then there was a fight with Ursula, who declared that she would not go to court if her mother did not; but she was overruled at last by that mother's tears at her defiance; and let herself be presented, together with Blanche, by Lady Kirkaldy.

To Ursula it was altogether a strange time, full of the same kind of reckless swing and sense of intoxication that had possessed her at Bridgefield. Not that there was an excessive amount of actual gaiety. Hot rooms and late hours were soon found not to agree with Mrs. Egremont. She looked faded and languid after evening parties; and, as her husband really cared more to have her ready to wait upon him and amuse him than for anything else, he did not insist on her going out more than might be needful to establish her position, or when it suited him to show her off. The other purposes were quite as well served by letting Ursula go out with Lady Kirkaldy, who was warmly interested in mother and daughter, glad of a companion for Blanche, and still more glad of a companion for herself. For she was not slow to discover that exhibitions, which were merely fashionable gapeseed to her niece, were to Nuttie real delights, viewed intelligently, and eliciting comments and questions that Lady Kirkaldy and even her husband enjoyed in their fresh interest, but which were unendurable weariness to Blanche, unless she had some one to chatter with.

Lectures and lessons, which the aunt hoped to render palatable by their being shared by the two cousins, only served to show the difference between a trained and eager, and an untrained and idle, nature. With the foreign society to be met at Lord Kirkaldy's, Blanche was less at a loss than her brother, and could get on by the help of nods and becks and wreathed smiles; but Nuttie, fresh from her winter abroad, could really talk, and was often in request as a useful person to help in entertaining. She thus saw some of the choicest society in London, and, in addition, had as much of the youthful gaiety as Lady Kirkaldy thought wholesome for the two girls. Also there were those ecclesiastical delights and privileges which had been heard of at Micklethwayte, and were within reach, greatly enjoyed by Mrs. Egremont whenever she could share them, though her daughter chafed at her treating all except the chief service on Sunday as more indulgence than duty.

Nuttie was strong, with that spring of energy which unbroken health and a quiet life lays up, and, in her own phrase, she went in for everything, from early services to late balls, thinking all right because it was seldom that her day did not begin with matins or Celebration, and because she was not taken to more than two balls a week, and conversed at times with superior people, or looked at those with world-famed names. Possibly the whirl was greater than if it had been mere gaiety, for then the brain would not have participated in it. Church functions, with the scurry to

go at all, or to obtain a seat, fine music, grand sermons, religious meetings, entertainments for the poor, lectures, lessons, exhibitions, rides, drives, kettle-drums, garden-parties, concerts, theatres, operas, balls, chattering, laughing, discussing, reading up current subjects, enjoying attention, excitement as to what should be done and how,—one thing drove out another in perpetual succession, and the one thing she never did or could do was to sit still and think! Rest was simply dreamless sleep, generally under the spell of a strong will to wake at the appointed hour for church. The short intervals of being alone with her mother were spent in pouring out histories of her doings, which were received with a sympathy that doubled their pleasure, excepting when Nuttie thought proper to grumble and scold at her mother's not coming to some Church festival at an hour when she thought Mr. Egremont might want her.

Of him Nuttie saw very little. He did not want her, and cared little what she did, as long as she was under the wing of Lady Kirkaldy, whose patronage was a triumphant refutation of all doubts. He went his own way, and had his own club, his own associates, and, with his wife always at his beck and call, troubled himself very little about anything else.

Alice spent a good deal of time alone, chiefly in waiting his pleasure; but she had her own quiet occupations, her books, her needlework, her housekeeping, and letter-writing, and was peacefully happy as long as she did not displease Nuttie. There were no

collisions between father and daughter, and the household arrangements satisfied that fastidious taste. She was proud of Ursula's successes, but very thankful not to be dragged out to share them, though she was much less shy, and more able on occasion to take her place.

One pain she had. Good old Mrs. Nugent was rapidly decaying, and she shared with all her loving heart in the grief this was to Mary and to Miss Headworth, and longed to help them in their nursing. She would not grieve Nuttie by dwelling constantly on the bad accounts, and the girl hardly attended to them in the tumult of occupations; and so at last, when the final tidings came in the second week in July, they were an absolute shock to Nuttie, and affected her as the first grief sometimes does. Mrs. Nugent was really the first person of her own intimate knowledge who had died, and in the excited state in which she was, the idea of the contrast between her own occupations and Mary's was so dreadful to her that she wept most bitterly, with the sobs of childhood, such as she really did not know how to restrain.

It was an unfortunate day, for it was one of the few on which Mr. Egremont wanted to take out his ladies. There was to be a great garden-party at Richmond, given by one of his former set, who had lately whitewashed himself by marrying a very fast and fashionable lady. Nuttie had heard strong opinions on the subject at Lord Kirkaldy's; but her father was quite elated at being in a position to countenance his old friends. Alice, in the midst of her sorrow, recollected this with consternation.

'My dear, my dear, hush! You must stop yourself! Remember we have to go out.'

'Go—out,' cried Nuttie, her sobs arrested by very horror. 'You wouldn't go——!'

'I am afraid your father would be very much vexed——'

'Let him! It is a horrid wicked place to go to at all; and now—when dear, dear old Mrs. Nugent is lying there—and——'

The crying grew violent again, and in the midst in walked Mr. Egremont with an astonished 'What is all this?'

'We have lost one of our dear kind old friends at Micklethwayte,' said Alice, going towards him; 'dear old Mrs. Nugent,' and she lifted up her tear-stained face, which he caressed a little and said, 'Poor old body;' but then, at a sob, 'Can't you stop Ursula from making such a row and disfiguring herself? You must pick up your looks, Edda, for I mean you to make a sensation at Jerningham's.'

'Oh, Alwyn, if you could let us stay at home! Mrs. Nugent was so good to us, and it does seem unkind——' The tears were in her eyes again.

'Nonsense!' he said impatiently. 'I promised Jerningham, and it is absurd to have you shutting yourself up for every old woman at Micklethwayte.'

Thereupon Ursula wiped away her tears, and stood up wrathful before him. 'I am not going,' she said.

'Oh, indeed!' he returned in a tone that made her still more angry. 'Hein'! a French ejaculation which

he had the habit of uttering in a most exasperating manner.

'No,' she said. 'It is scarcely a place to which we even ought to be asked to go, and certainly not when——'

'Do you hear that, Mrs. Egremont?' he asked.

'Oh, Nuttie, Nuttie, dear!' she implored; 'don't.'

'No, mother,' said Nuttie, with flashing eyes; 'if you care so little for your best friends as to let yourself be dragged out among all sorts of gay, wicked people when your dear friend is lying dead, I'm sure I shan't go with you.'

Her father laughed a little. 'A pretty figure you are, to make a favour of accompanying us!'

'Oh go away, go away, Nuttie,' entreated her mother. 'You don't know what you are saying.'

'I do know,' said Nuttie, exasperated perhaps by the contrast in the mirror opposite between her own swelled, disfigured face, and the soft tender one of her mother with the liquid eyes. 'I know how much you care for the dear friends who took care of us when we were forsaken!'

And with this shaft she marched out of the room, while her father again laughed, and said, 'Have they been training her for the tragic stage? Never mind, Edda, the little vixen will come to her senses upstairs, and be begging to go.'

'I don't think she will,' said Alice sadly; 'she is not that sort of stuff, and she was very fond of Mrs. Nugent. Oh, Alwyn! if you could let us off.'

'Not after that explosion, certainly,' he said. 'Besides, I promised Jerningham, and such an excuse would never hold water. She is not even a relation.'

'No, but she was very good to me.'

'The more reason why you should not stay at home and be hipped. Never mind that silly girl. She will be all right by and by.'

On the contrary, she did not come down to luncheon, and when, about an hour later, Alice, after writing a few tender loving words to the mourners, went up to her daughter's room, it was to find a limp and deplorable figure lying across the bed, and to be greeted with a fresh outburst of sobs and inarticulate exclamations.

'Oh Nuttie, dear, this will not do! It is not right. Dear good Mrs. Nugent herself would tell you that this is not the way any one so good and so suffering should be grieved for. Think——'

'Oh, I know all that!' cried Nuttie, impatiently; 'but she—she was the dearest—and nobody cares for her but me. Not even you——'

Again Alice tried to debate the point, and urge on her the duties of moderation, self-control, and obedience, but the poor gentle mother was at a great disadvantage.

In the first place, she respected and almost envied her daughter's resistance, and really did not know whether it was timidity or principle that made it her instinct to act otherwise; in the next, Ursula could always talk her down; and, in the third, she was, and greatly she reproached herself for that same, in great dread of setting herself off into tears that might become

hysterical if she once gave way to them. And what would be her husband's feelings if she too collapsed and became unpresentable.

So, having once convinced herself that even if Nuttie had been a consenting party, no amount of cold water and eau-de-cologne would bring those bloodshot eyes, swollen lids, and mottled cheeks to be fit to be seen, she fled as fast as possible from the gasps of barbed reproaches which put her own composure in peril, and dressed with the heaviest of hearts, coupled with the utmost solicitude to look her best. If she had not thought it absolutely wrong, she would even have followed Martin's suggestion, and put on a *soupçon* of *rouge;* but by the time she was summoned to the carriage the feverishness of her effort at self-control had done the work, and her husband had paid her the compliment of observing that she looked pretty enough for two.

Nuttie heard them drive off, with a burst of fresh misery of indignation against her mother—now as a slave and a victim—now as forgetting her old home. It was chiefly in mutterings; she had pretty well used up her tears, for, unconsciously perhaps, she had worked them up as a defensive weapon against being carried to the party; and now that the danger was over, her head throbbed, her eyes burnt, and her throat ached too much for her to wish to cry any more. She had not felt physically like this, since the day, seven years ago, when she and Mildred Sharpe had been found suspiciously toying with the key of the arithmetic, and had been debarred from trying for the prize. Then she felt

debased and guilty; now she felt, or ought to feel, like a heroine maintaining the right.

She got up and set herself to rights as well as she could. Martin, who had been allowed to know that she had lost an old friend, petted and pitied her, and brought her a substantial meal with her tea, after which she set out to evensong at the church at the end of the square, well veiled under a shady hat, and with a conviction that something ought to happen.

Nothing did, however, happen; she met no one whom she knew, the psalms were not particularly appropriate, and her attention wandered away to the scene at home. She did not come back, as she was sure she ought to have done, soothed, exhilarated, and refreshed, but rather in a rasped state of mind, and a conscience making a vehement struggle to believe itself in the right—a matter in which she thoroughly succeeded.

She wrote a long letter to Mary Nugent, and shed some softer tears over it, then she built a few castles on her future escape from the power of her father; and then she picked up *Reata*, and became absorbed in it, regretting only the weakness of her eyes, and the darkening of the summer evening.

She was still reading when the others came home. Her mother kissed her, but looked so languid and tired-out that Nuttie was shocked, and Martin declared that she ought not to go down to dinner.

A *tête-à-tête* dinner between father and daughter was too dreadful to Alice's imagination to be permitted,

so she dressed and went down, looking like a ghost. Mr. Egremont scowled at Nuttie, Nuttie scowled at him, each considering it the fault of the other, and when at last it was over, Alice gave up the struggle, and went off to bed, leaving a contrite message that her headache would be better to-morrow.

'All your accursed folly and obstinacy,' observed Mr. Egremont, when Nuttie, with a tone of monition gave him the message.

'I should call it the consequence of being dragged out with a sore heart,' returned Nuttie—a little speech she had prepared ever since she had seen how knocked up her mother was.

'Then I should recommend keeping your ideas to yourself,' he answered, looking at her in his annihilating manner.

She was put down. She thought afterwards of a hundred things that she could have said to him, but she was crushed for the present, and when he went out she could only betake herself to *Reata*, and forget all about it as much as she could.

When she went upstairs, at the end of the third volume, Martin was on the watch, and would not let her go into the room.

'I have been at hand, ma'am, without her guessing it, and I am happy to say her tears has had a free course when she was in bed. Yes, ma'am, suppressed grief is always dangerous.'

Mrs. Egremont was still prostrate with fatigue and headache the next day, and Nuttie had all the quiet

luxuriating in reminiscences she desired. Her father was vexed and angry, and kept out of the way, but it must be confessed that Nuttie's spirits had so much risen by the afternoon that it was a sore concession to consistency when she found herself not expected at Blanche's last little afternoon dance at Lady Kirkaldy's !

CHAPTER XX.

WOLF.

'If I cannot once or twice in a quarter bear out a knave against an honest man, I have but very little credit with your Worship.'

II. King Henry IV.

ANOTHER cause besides Ursula's recalcitrance and her mother's ailment contributed to disturb Mr. Egremont, and bring him home. His agent, by name Bulfinch, a solicitor at Redcastle, came to him with irrefragable proofs of gross peculation on the part of the bailiff who managed the home farm which supplied the house and stables, and showed him that it was necessary to make a thorough investigation and change of system.

In point of fact, Mr. Egremont greatly preferred being moderately cheated to exerting himself to investigate, but this was going beyond moderation, and the explosion had been too public to be passed over. So he came home and sat by, while his wife and Mr. Bulfinch did the work for him, and made it evident to him that the frauds had been of long standing, and carried on with the connivance of the coachman, of Gregorio,—who had before Mrs. Egremont's arrival

acted as house steward,—and of the former cook. Indeed, it was the housekeeper whom Mrs. Egremont had left in charge, whose refusal to connive had brought about the discovery.

Gregorio's share in all was sufficiently evident, and Alice's heart leapt with hope. Her husband would be wholly her own if his evil genius were once departed, but Mr. Egremont would not see it. He had no objection to sacrifice the coachman and all his underlings, with the bailiff and his entire family, and felt none of the pity that Alice had for the pretty, silly, half-educated daughters; but as to the valet—Pooh! pooh! the poor fellow had been out of the way all this time—whatever he had done had been in the dark, ages long ago, before Bridgefield knew its mistress; he was a foreigner, and that was enough to prevent him from forgathering with the English. It was all their English prejudice.

'I can show you facts and figures, sir,' said Mr. Bulfinch.

'I daresay, a year or more old. Why, I was an unprotected carcase then—a mere prey—the fellow only did after his kind.'

Alice held her tongue then, but made an effort in private. 'Indeed, I don't think you know; I am afraid Gregorio is not altered. I found him out in his charges about the wine, and the servants' wages at Nice, only you wouldn't listen.'

'His little perquisites, my dear child! Come, nonsense, these foreign fellows don't pretend to have the

morals you ascribe to the native flunkey—generally without foundation either—they are much of a muchness as to that; but your Frenchman or Italian does it more neatly, and is a dozen times better servant than the other is.'

'But——'

'Oh, aye! I know you don't like him. But he knows his manners to you, I hope?' said Mr. Egremont, with a suddenness that made her wish she could truthfully say he did not.

'Yes, he always is—is respectful, but somehow I see it is under protest.'

Mr. Egremont laughed. 'Rivals—yes, I see; why, you don't consider the sore trial of having a full-grown mistress turned in upon him! Look here, you keep the keys already, but the new fellow at the farm and all the rest of them shall account to you for everything—Gregorio and all. Won't that satisfy you?'

''Tis not only the money, but I think Gregorio is a bad—not a good—man.'

'Ho, ho! she wants to advertise for a pious footman and coachman! eh? No, I thank you, my dear Edda, I agree with—who was it who said, "*Volez moi, mais sans m'ennuyer.*"'

The Rectory likewise had hoped for Gregorio's dismissal, and there were grave looks when Alice had to confess that nothing would move her husband against him. The Canon even lashed himself up to say, 'I tell you how it is, Alwyn, you'll never do any good with your household, while you keep that fellow.'

'I am not aware what description of good you

expect me to do with it, Will,' coolly answered the elder brother in a disconcerting tone.

Poor Alice, on her side, thought of the Little Master, and then wondered if it was uncharitable to do so. For she knew it had become war to the knife with Gregorio! Whether his master told him, or whether it were his own evil conscience, or the wonderful intuition of servants, he certainly knew of the pressure for his dismissal, and he visited it on her as much as he durst.

Outwardly deferential, he could thwart and annoy her in a hundred ways, from making love to the housemaids to making evil suggestions to his master, yet never giving her any overt cause of complaint. He could worry and sting her under the politest exterior, and he knew very well that the most effectual form of annoyance was the persuading his master that any discomfort or lassitude was to be removed by some form of narcotic. This would have the further advantage of stupefying Mr. Egremont, and making him more ready to lapse under the old influence; while the duration and strength of the new one was already a surprise to Gregorio.

But there was no doubt that Mrs. Egremont had profited by her year of training. She looked tired, and less youthful and pretty, but she had gained in grace and importance as well as in style, and was much more really the mistress of Bridgefield. Her shyness had passed away, and she knew now to take her place in society, though still she was somewhat

silent. And her husband depended upon her entirely for all his correspondence, for much of his occupation and amusement, and even for the regulation of his affairs. In the household, Gregorio was little more than his personal attendant, and she had the general management, even of the other men-servants. The Canoness might well say it had turned out better than she expected.

And Nuttie had become more womanly, and had acquired the indefinable polish given by a London season. She had learnt the art of conversation, and could make herself agreeable to her uncle, or to any one else who came in her way. Even May allowed that she had something in her, and cultivated her more than before; but, on the other hand, even the Rectory could perceive that there was now an absolute alienation between her and her father, and what might before have been fear had become dislike. If she had to refer to him, especially if her plans for herself or her mother were crossed, there was always a tone of bitterness or of sarcasm about her; and her greater boldness and freedom of speech would occasionally manifest itself towards him. This was not indeed often, since not only did his cool contempt make her come off the worst in the encounters, but the extreme distress they gave to her mother made her refrain whenever her temper, or what she thought her conscience, would let her; but still there was always a danger which kept poor Alice on thorns whenever there was a possible difference of schemes or opinions.

Mrs. William Egremont was seriously considering of representing to Ursula that her conduct was bad taste, bad policy, and, moreover, was doing her mother's spirits and health serious harm; but it was a delicate matter in which to meddle, and the good lady could not make up her mind how far to surrender her brother-in-law's character and allow a partial justification to Ursula. She was a cautious woman, and waited and watched her opportunities.

In the beginning of October Mr. and Mrs. Egremont were invited to a great shooting party at Sir James Jerningham's. The invitation did not include Ursula. Perhaps she had never dawned on their hostess's imagination; perhaps it was that Lady Jerningham was well known to dislike girls, or any one who might absorb young men's attention. At any rate the omission was a cause of thankfulness to the party concerned, and she did not neglect to worry her mother by a protest against keeping such company as would be met at Waldicotes.

Alice smiled a little faintly and said, 'I don't think it hurts me, my dear; I don't understand half of what they talk about, and they are always kind to me.'

'I don't think you ought to go among them or countenance them.'

'My dear child,'—and the colour rose—'I don't feel as if I had a right to set myself above any one.'

'Mother!'

'People might have said just the same of me.'

'And whose fault was that?' muttered Nuttie under her breath, but Mrs. Egremont would not hear. She only pleaded, as perhaps mother ought not to have done with child.

'You know, Nuttie, it is not for my own pleasure, but your father's eyesight makes him dislike to go anywhere without me now; and I really should be uneasy about him.'

'Yes; he is all you care for,' said Nuttie. 'You sacrifice everything you used to think essential, just to his will and pleasure.'

'Oh, Nuttie, I hope not; I don't think I do!'

'If I thought it was doing him any good I should not so much mind,' went on the girl; 'but he is just the same, and I am always thinking of "As the husband is, the wife is——"'

'Hush! hush! You have no right to think in that way of your father. I will not hear it. I have let you say too much already, Nuttie.' Then after a pause she added, gently and wistfully, 'You have been better taught, and are clearer headed than ever I was, my Nuttie, and it is quite right that you should hate what seems evil to you. I can only go on trying to do what seems my duty from day to day. I know,' she added with rising tears, 'that the sin and folly of my younger days worked a difficult position for us both; but we can only act according to our lights, and pray God to direct us; and please—please bear with me, my dear one, if the same course does not always seem right to us both.'

Nuttie had never heard her say anything so fully showing that she realised these difficulties, and, greatly touched, she asked pardon, kissed and caressed her mother. There was a calm over them for the next few days, and Nuttie actually refrained from bitter comments when her mother was not allowed to go to evensong on Sunday, on the plea of her being tired, but, as the girl believed, in order that she might read the newspapers aloud.

She knew that her silence was appreciated by the way her mother kissed her and called her a dear, good, considerate girl.

On Monday Mr. and Mrs. Egremont went away at what was a strangely early hour for the former, Nuttie spending her days at the Rectory.

On the Tuesday Blanche went with her little sister and the governess on a shopping expedition to Redcastle, and in relating her adventures on her return, she said, 'Oh, by the bye, I met Annaple in Park's shop!'

'Full of Micklethwayte news, I suppose,' said May.

'Yes, of course. Did you know, Nuttie, that your aunt was ill?'

'No, indeed, I did not. What was the matter?'

'Bronchitis, I believe—brown titus, as Betty Butter calls it.'

'Bronchitis! Oh dear! oh dear! Are you quite sure, Blanche?'

'Oh yes! I am quite certain Annaple said Mark told her that Miss Headworth was laid up with bronchitis.'

'And nobody has written to us all this week!' sighed Nuttie.

'I should think that a sign there could not be much in it,' observed May; 'it may be only a bad cold.'

'But Aunt Ursel had bronchitis four years ago, and was very ill indeed,' persisted Nuttie. 'I'm sure it is bronchitis, and that she won't let Miss Mary write to us.'

She was in much distress about it, though May privately told her that she ought to know Blanche's way better than to trust implicitly to any of her reports; and her aunt said much the same thing in more general terms, even proposing that if she did not hear the next morning she should go over to Lescombe to ascertain what Mark had really said.

This pacified her a little, but on her way home the alarm grew upon her, and, moreover, she recollected the opposition that she believed that her father was certain to make to either her mother or herself going to nurse her aunt. It flashed upon her that if she were to hasten to Micklethwayte on this alarm before there could be a prohibition, it would be no disobedience, and perfectly justifiable, not to say noble. Her parents were to return on Thursday evening, and she made up her mind that, unless she were fully reassured as to Miss Headworth's state, she would go off at once to Micklethwayte before any one could gainsay her. She had plenty of money, and she consulted the time-table in the hall before going upstairs. It only concerned

the nearest line, but she calculated that if she caught the express, she should reach her destination in time to write to her mother at Waldicotes, and prevent needless shocks. Her eagerness for the plan grew upon her, so that it seemed like liberation; she could hardly sleep for thinking of it, and certainly was not as much disappointed as she believed herself when the post came in—a blank.

Martin was away with her mistress, so Nuttie explained matters to the upper housemaid, who was very sympathetic, carried down her orders for the carriage, procured for her both breakfast and provision for the journey, and packed her clothes. Ursula would fain have been off before the Rectory was aware, but the two little girls came up with a message about the plans for the day, just as she was beginning an explanatory note, and she entrusted to them the information that she was so uneasy about Miss Headworth that she had decided on going to see for herself.

So in dashed Adela and Rosalind to their mother's room full of excitement with the news that Cousin Nuttie was gone off by the train, because her aunt was very ill indeed.

'Gone, Adela? are you sure? Really gone?'

'Oh yes, mamma! The dogcart was coming round, and she said she wanted to catch the 10.5 train, and was very sorry she had not time to write a note to you.'

'Was there a letter? What had she heard?'

'Oh, only that her aunt was so very ill! She did not tell us—did she, Rosie?'

'There was something about being in time to write to Aunt Alice,' suggested Adela.

'I am very sorry about this. I am afraid it will be a great shock to Alice,' observed the mother, as she imparted the news at her husband's dressing-room door.

'Young girls are so precipitate!' said the Canon.

'Your brother won't like it at all,' the lady continued.

'Not he. But after all, it is just as well that he was not asked. They do owe that poor old lady a good deal, and Alwyn's not the man to see it. I'm not sorry the girl took the matter into her own hands, though I couldn't have advised it.'

'Except that it will all fall on Alice.'

'He is very fond of Alice. She has done more with him than I ever thought possible. Kept him respectable this whole year, and really it grows on him. He makes ever so much more of her now than when he first brought her home—and no wonder. No, no; he won't fall foul of her.'

'Perhaps not; but it is just as bad, or worse, for her if he falls foul of her daughter. Besides, she is very much attached to her aunt. I wish I knew what the account was, or whether she knows anything about it.'

END OF VOL. I.

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